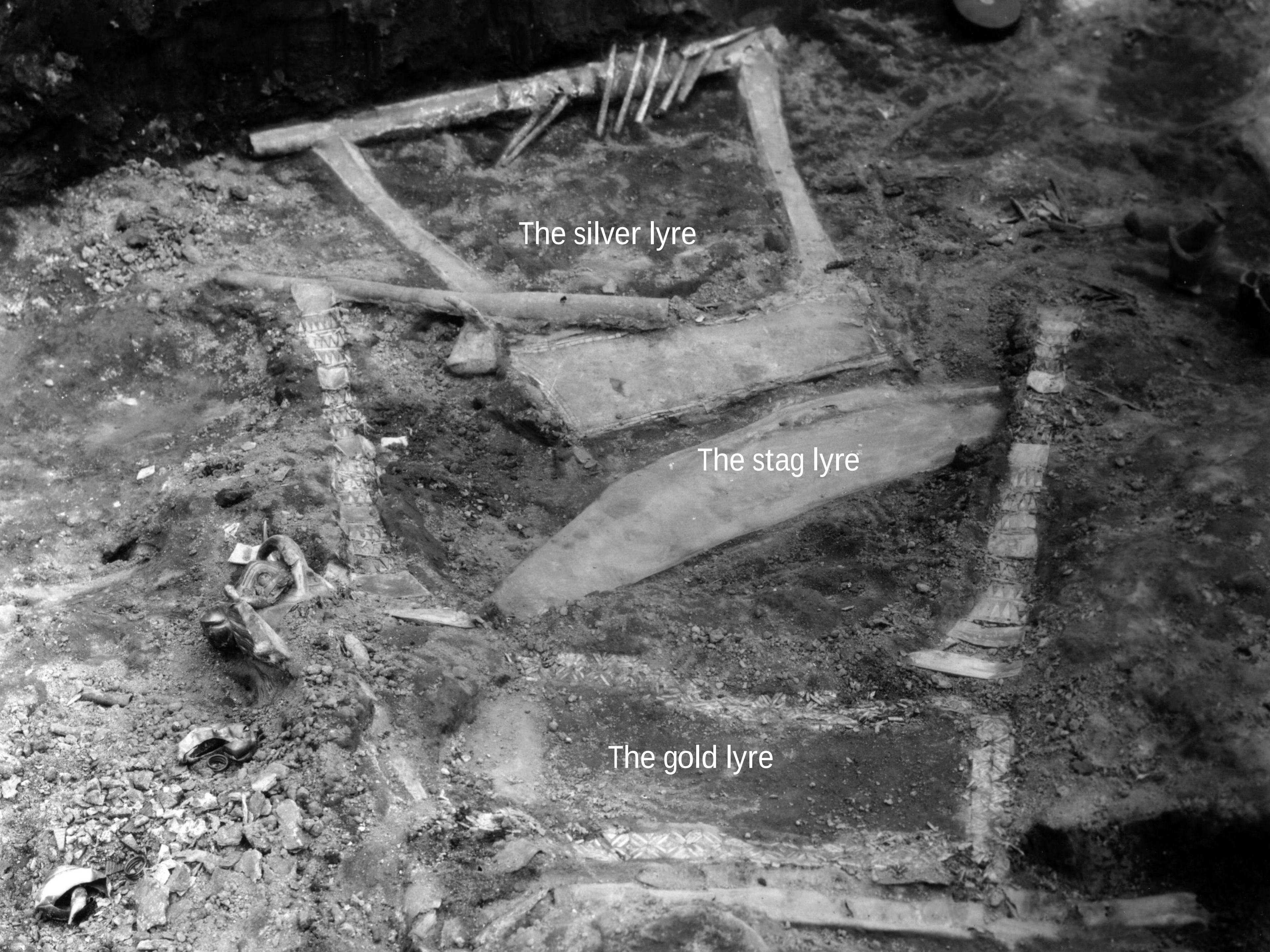
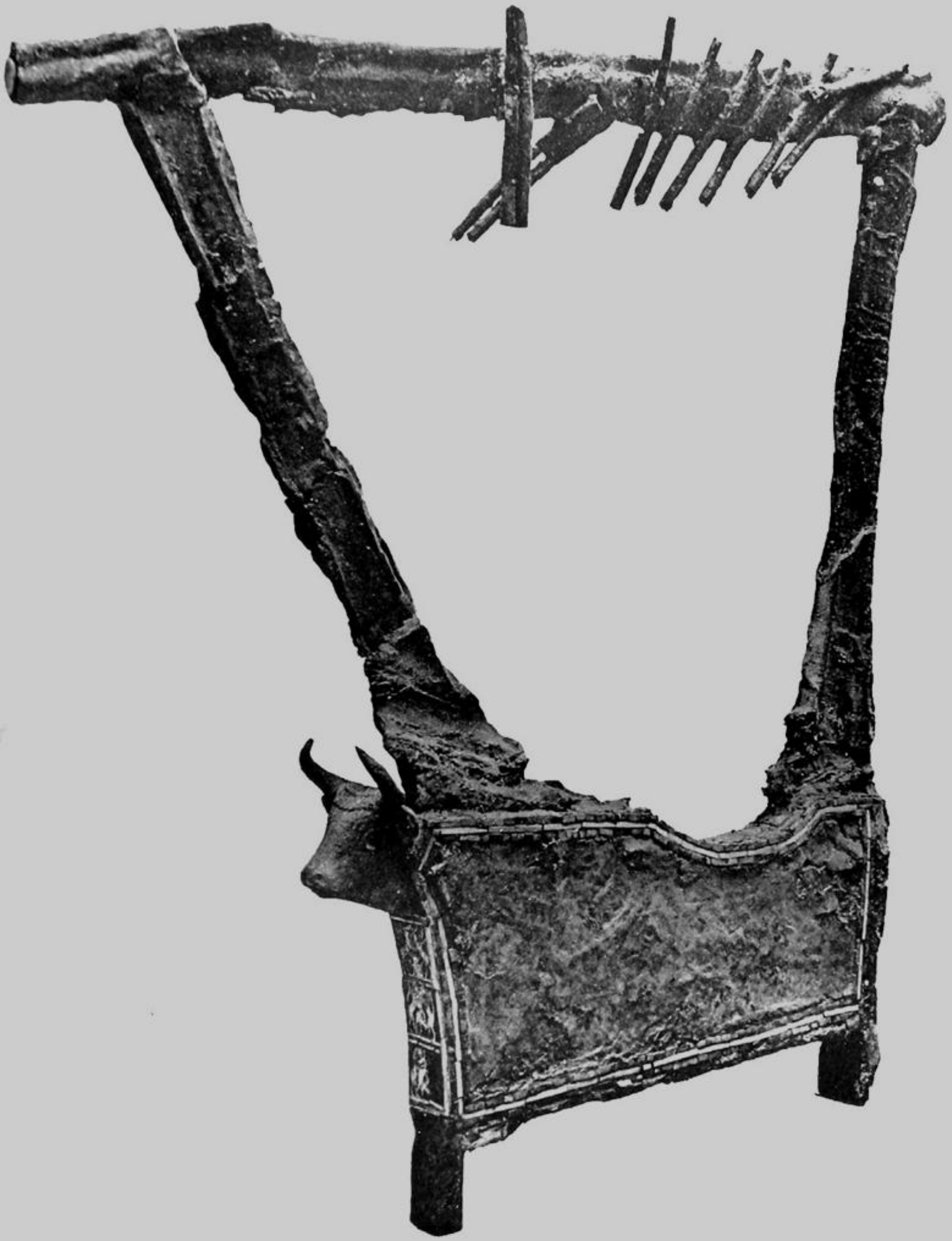
The silver Lyre
BM 121199

and its story until replication in 2009

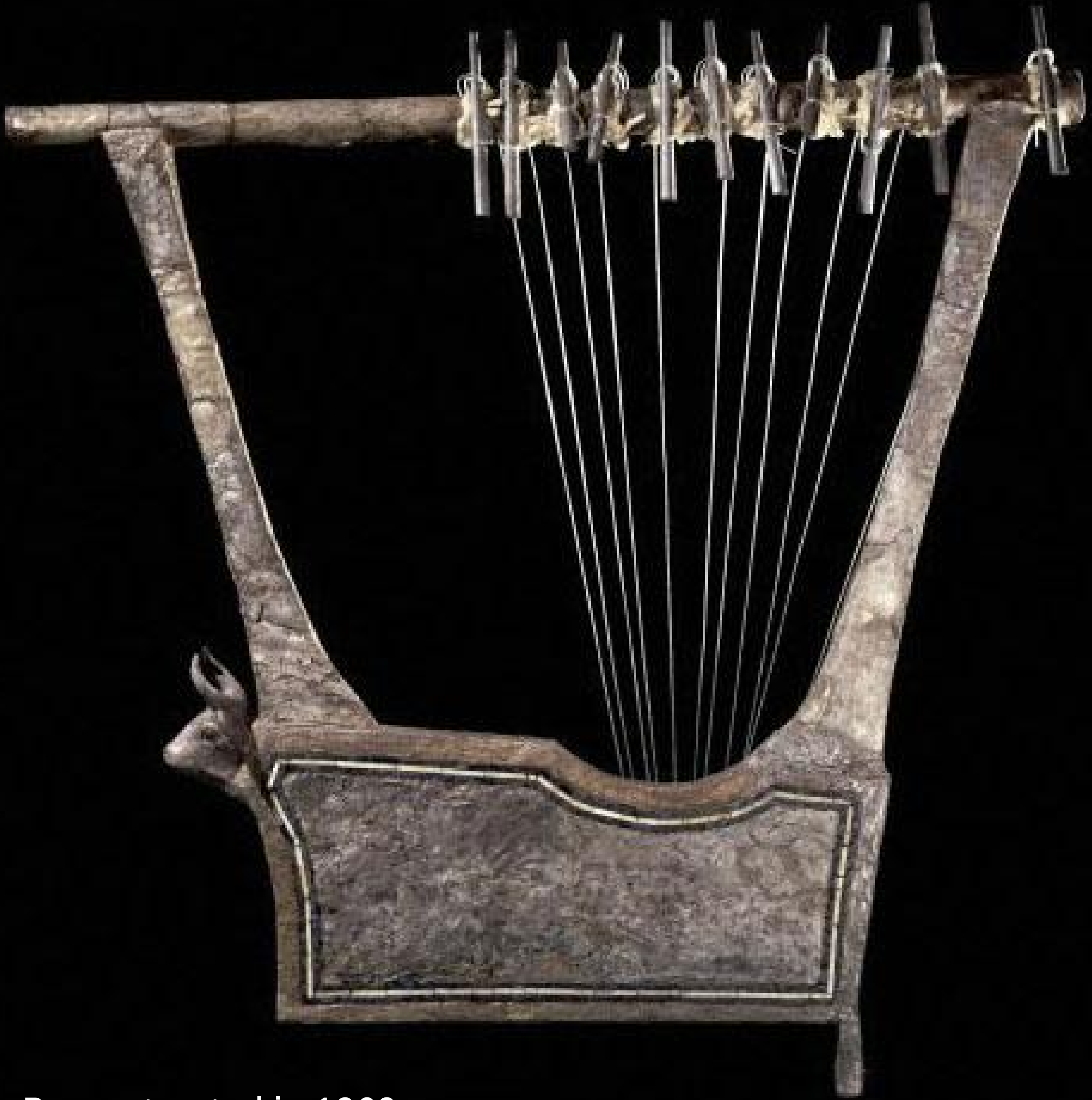
By

Richard Dumbrill
and
Myriam Marcetteau

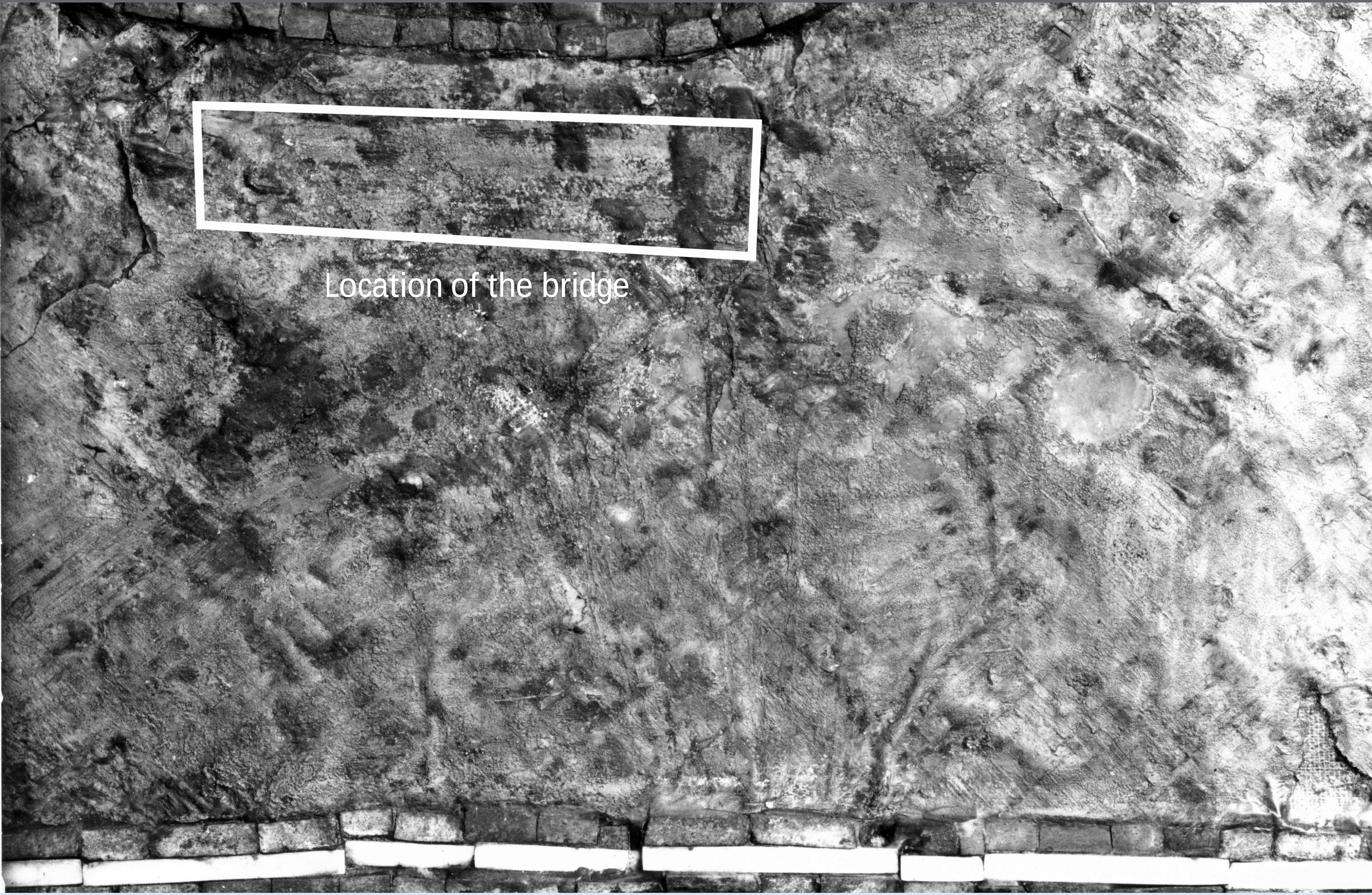

The silver lyre
The stag lyre
The gold lyre



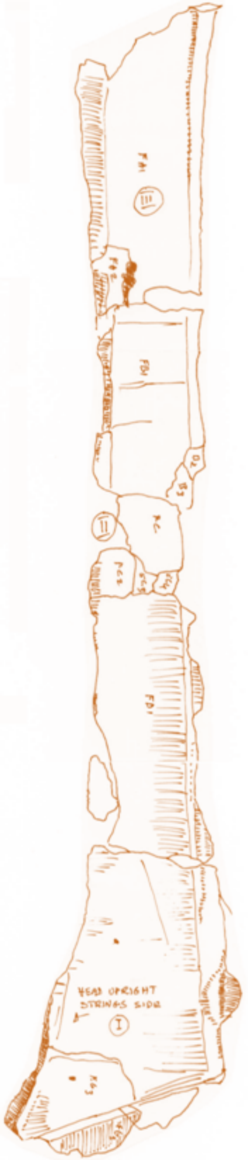
Prior to the collapse in July 1949

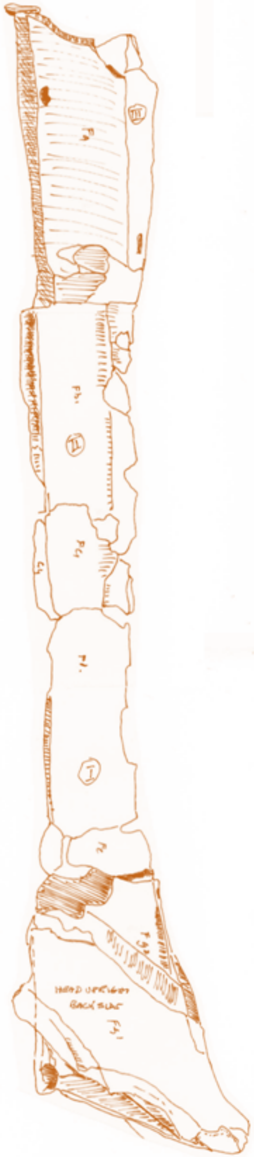


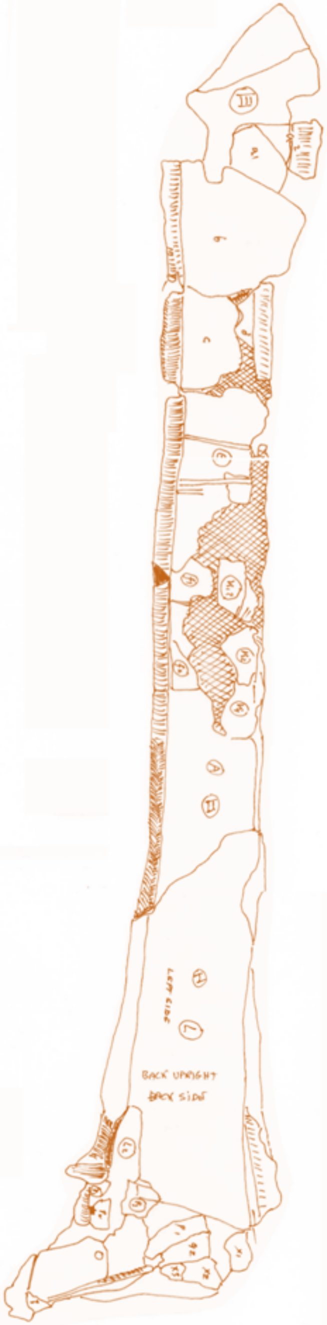
Reconstructed in 1969

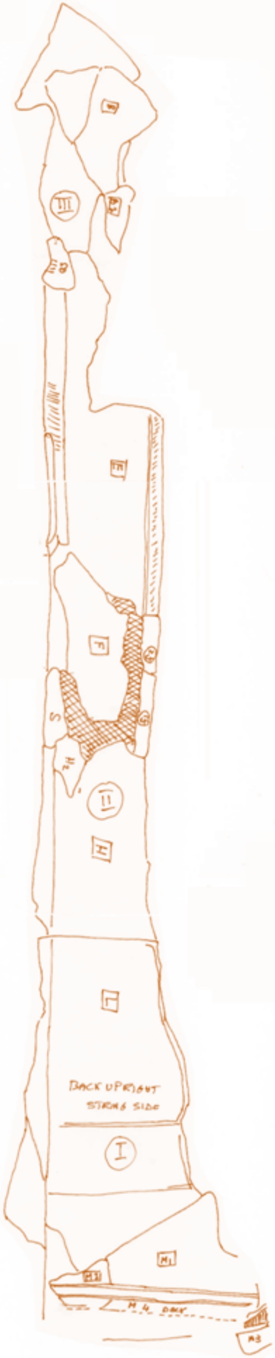


Location of the bridge

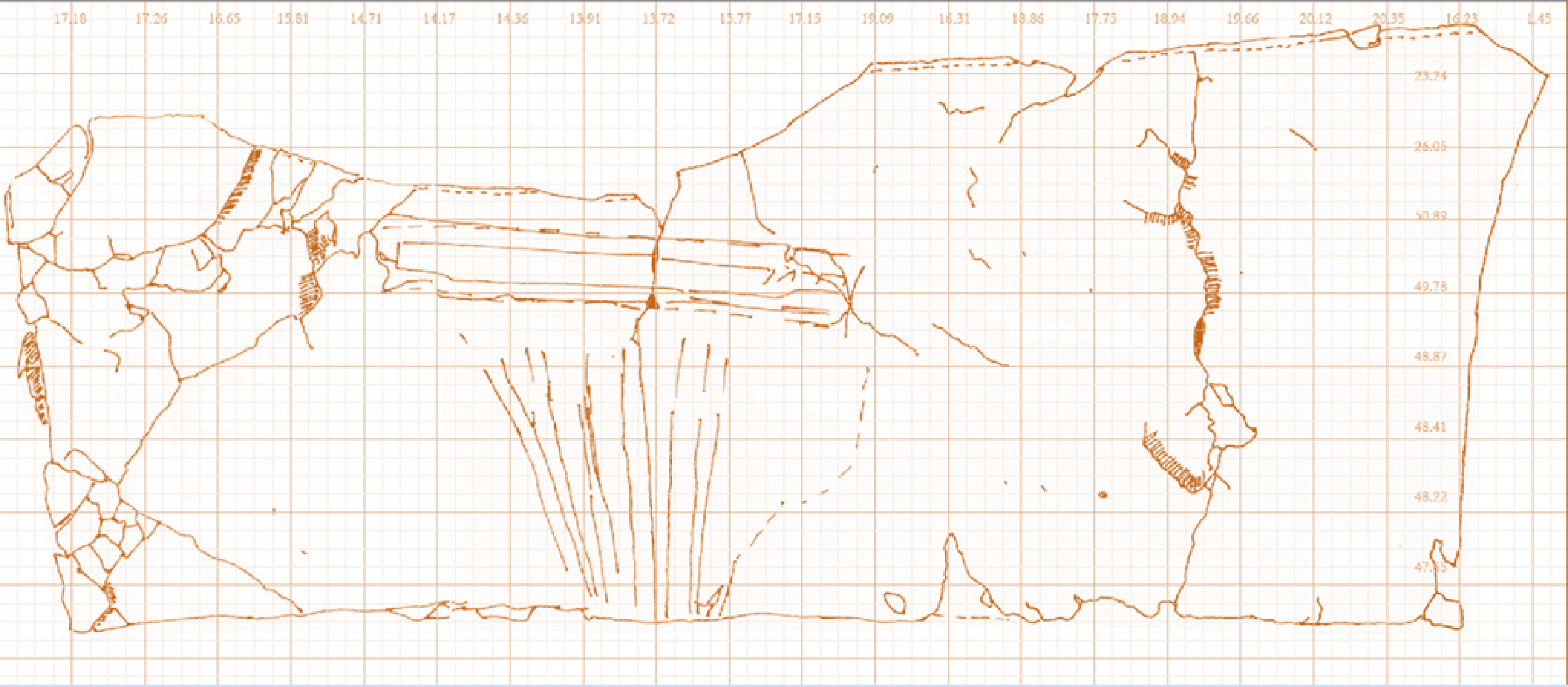

HEAD UPRIGHT
STRINGS SIDE
I
II
III


HEAD UPRIGHT
BACK SIDE
I
II
III

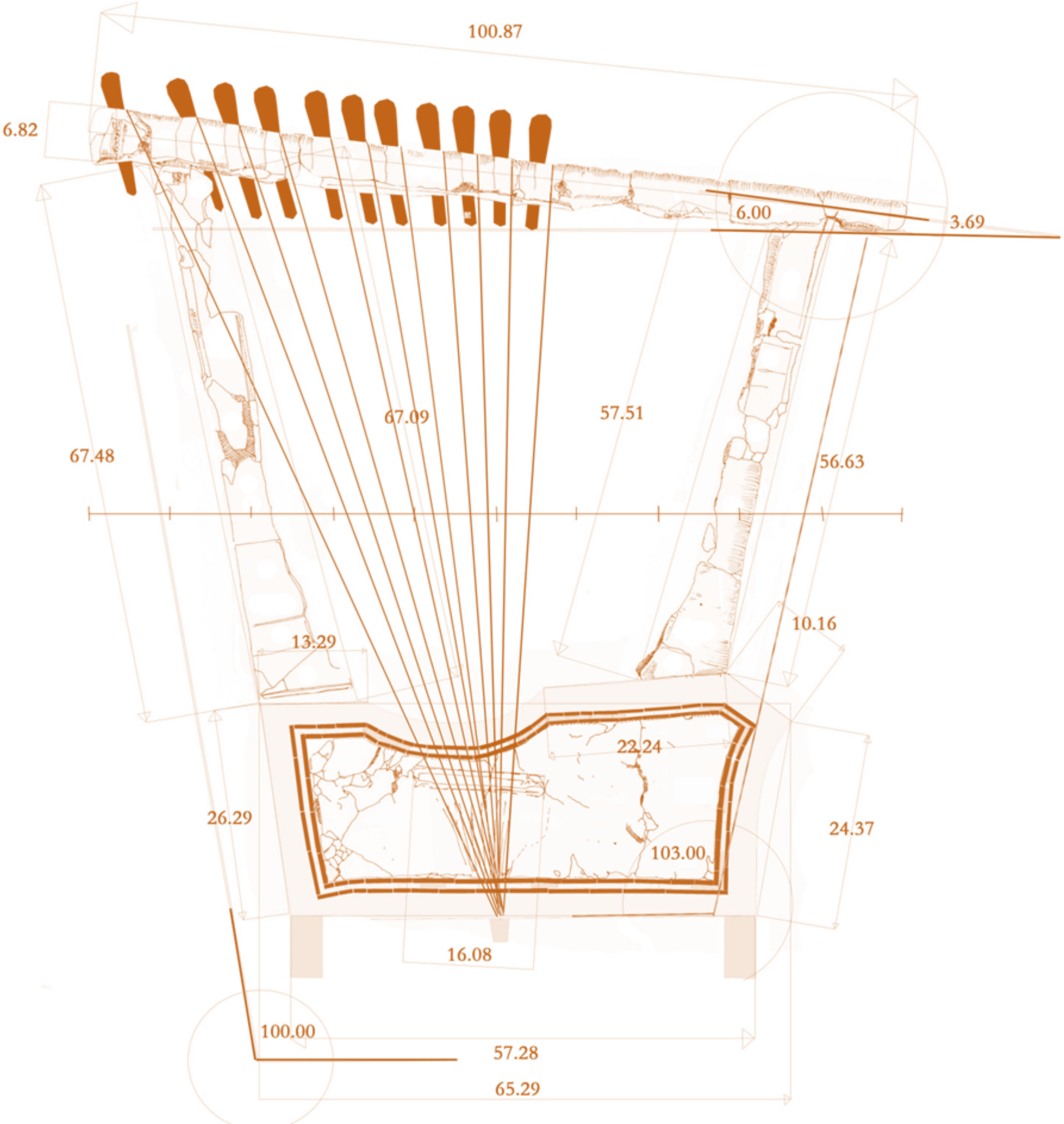

BACK UPRIGHT
BACK SIDE
LEFT SIDE
I
II
III


BACK UPRIGHT
STRING SIDE
I
II
III

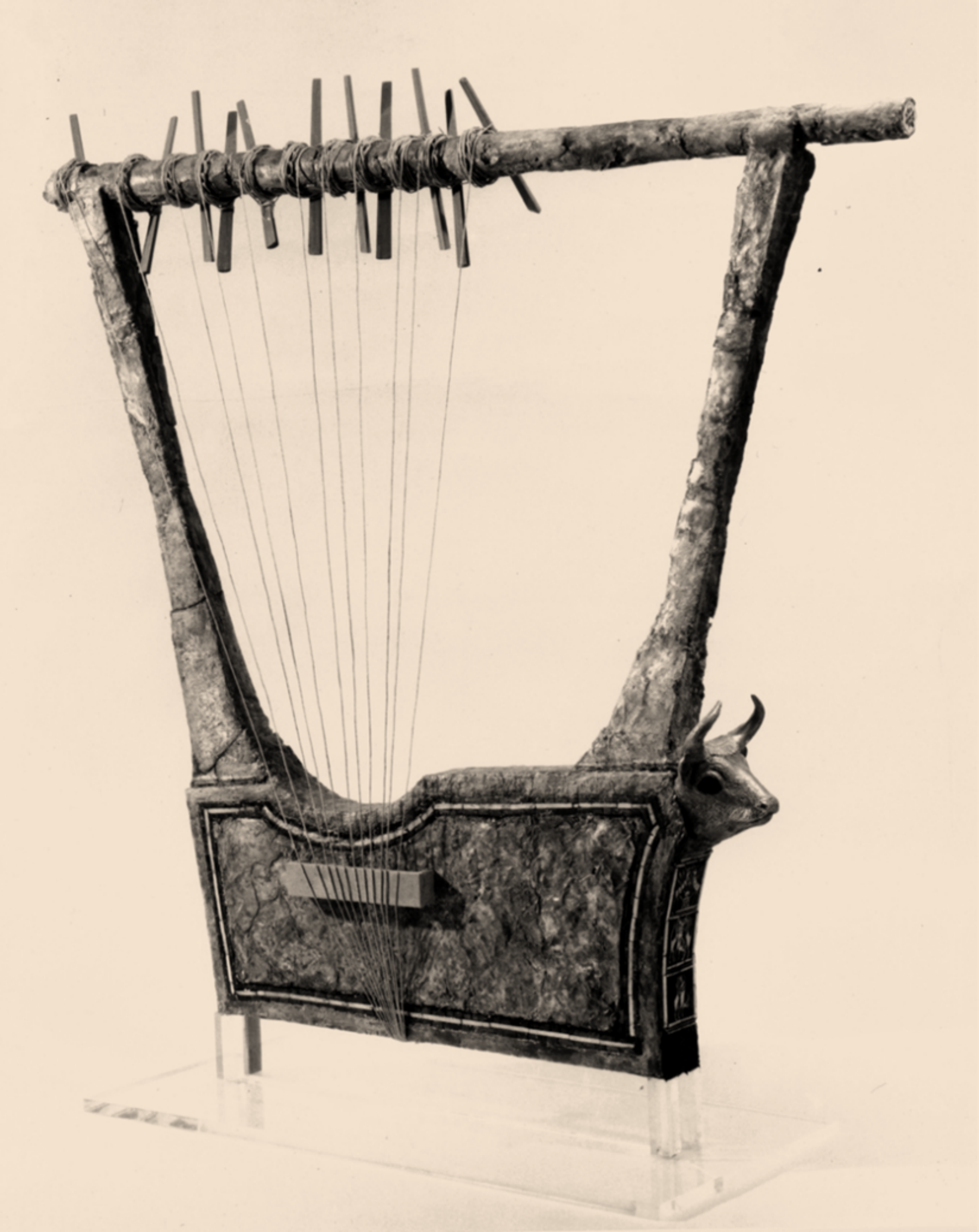
uprights



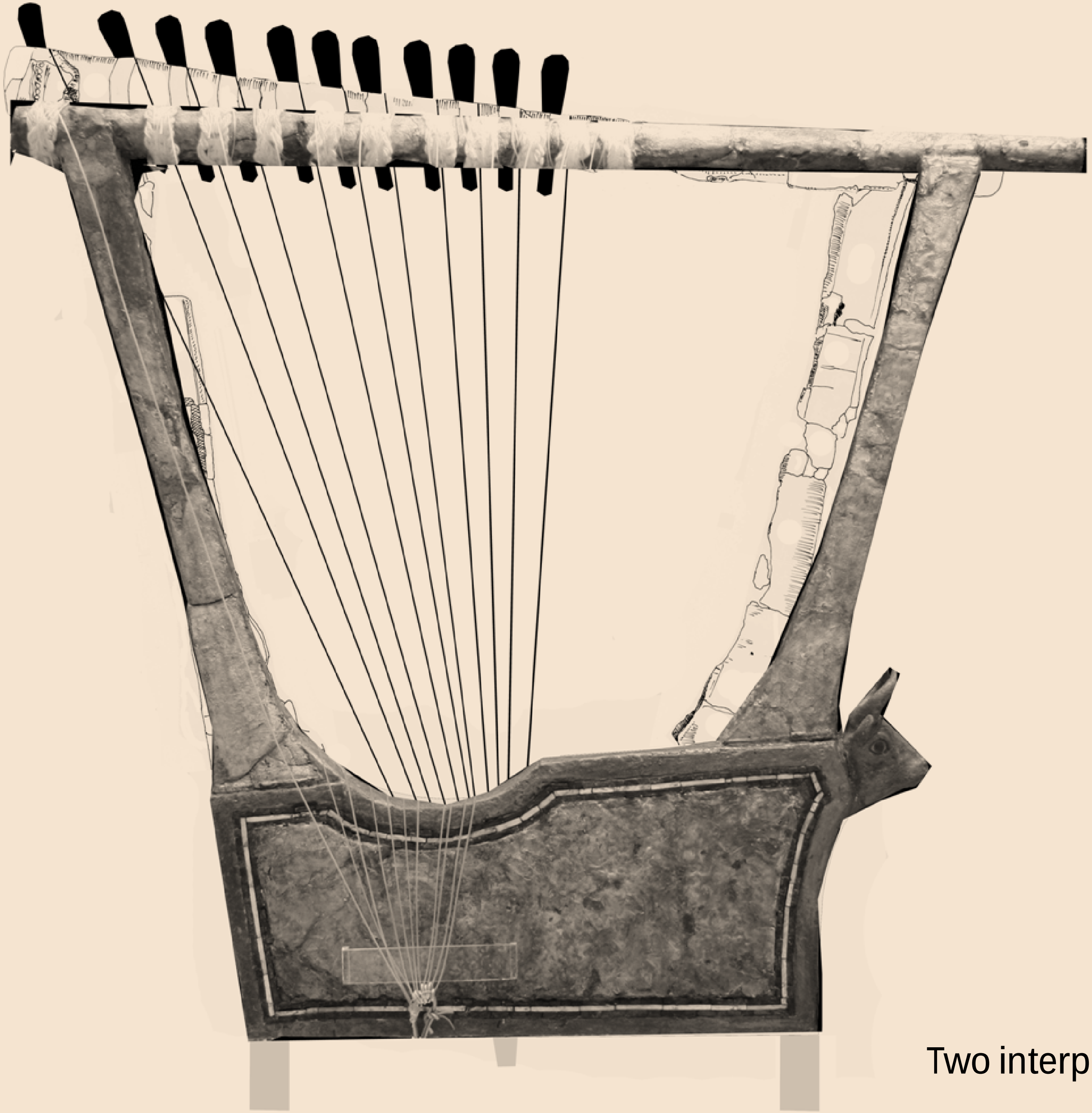
Soundboard and measurements



measurements

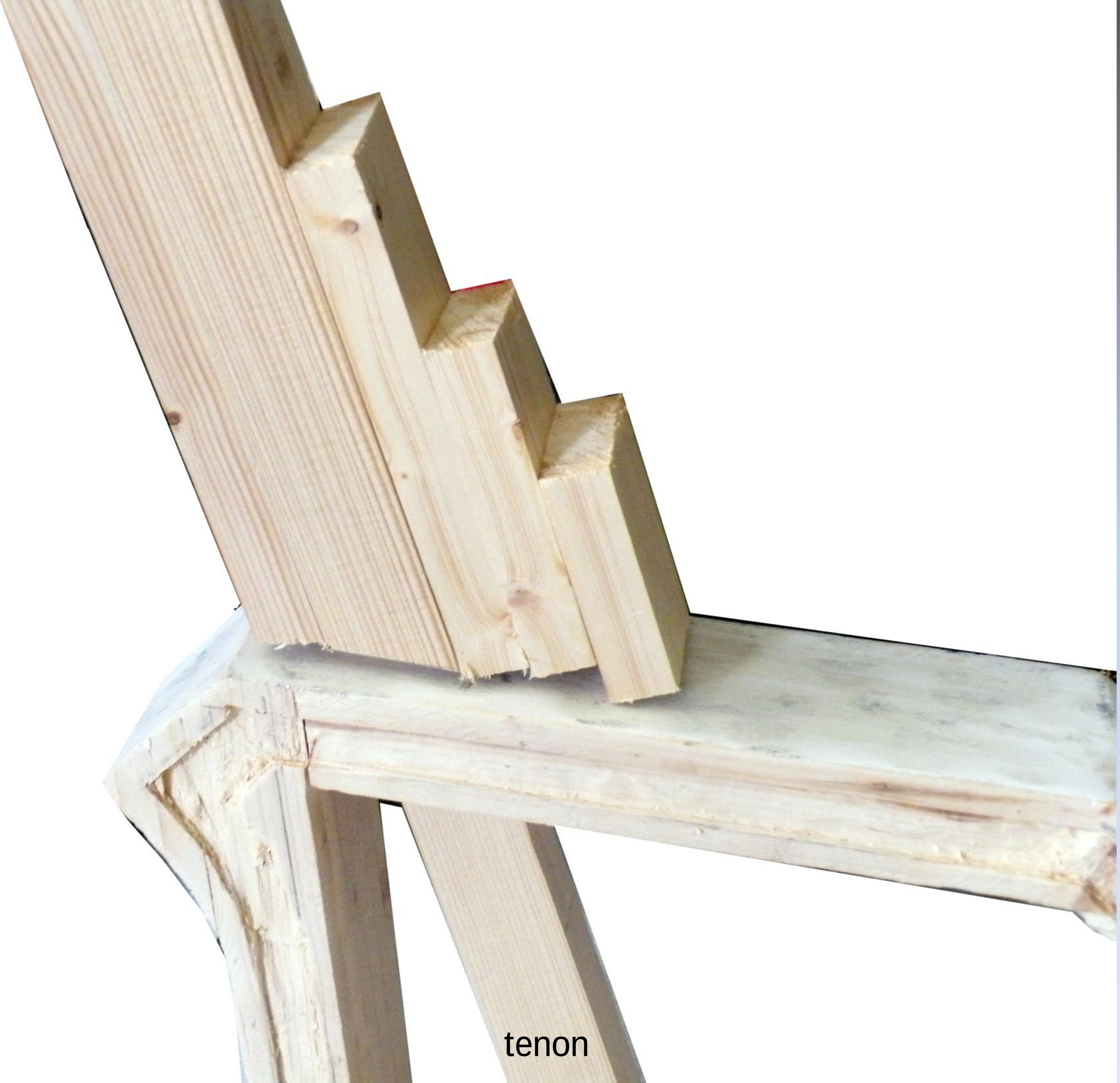


1969

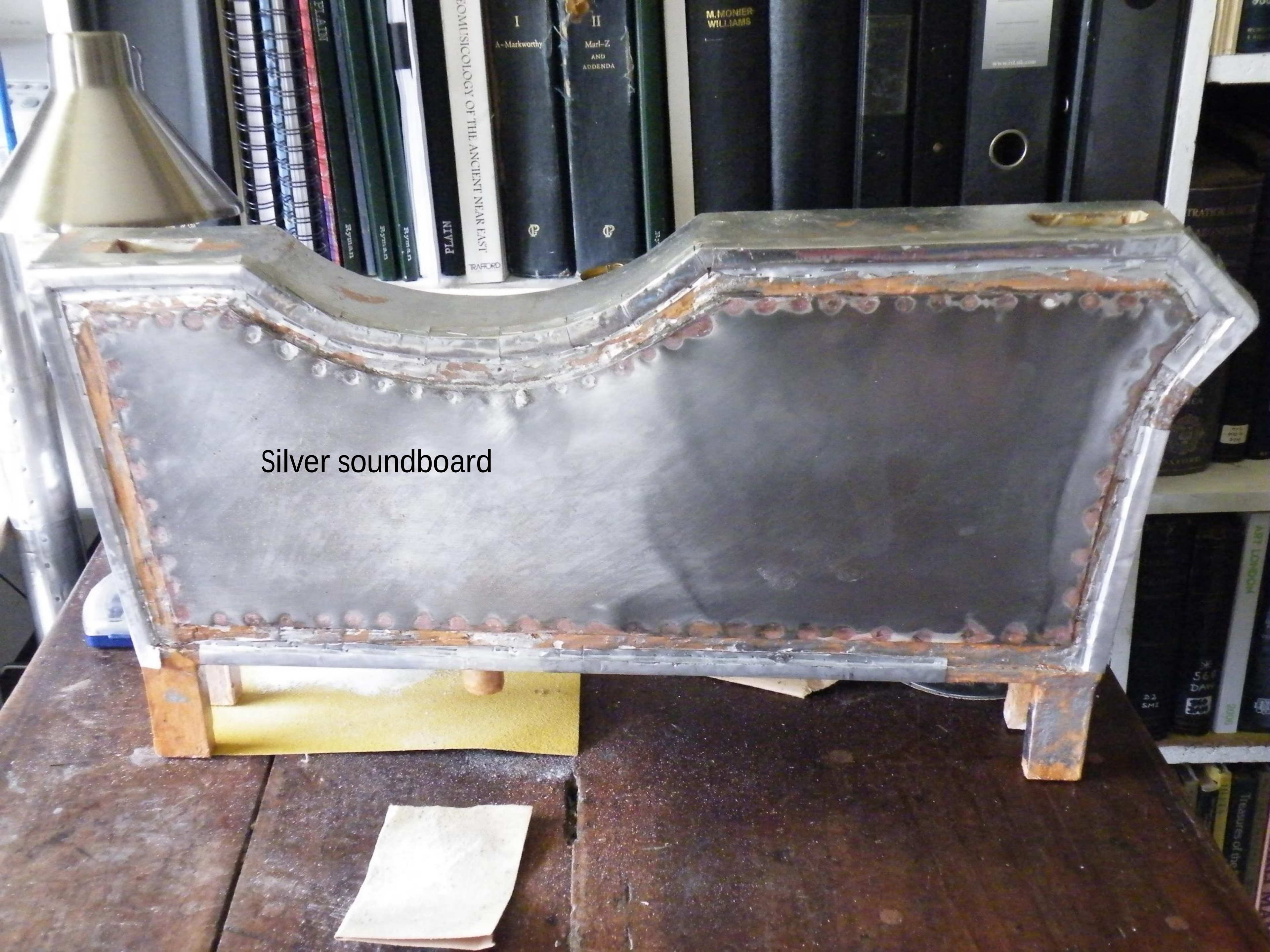


Two interpretations of the same

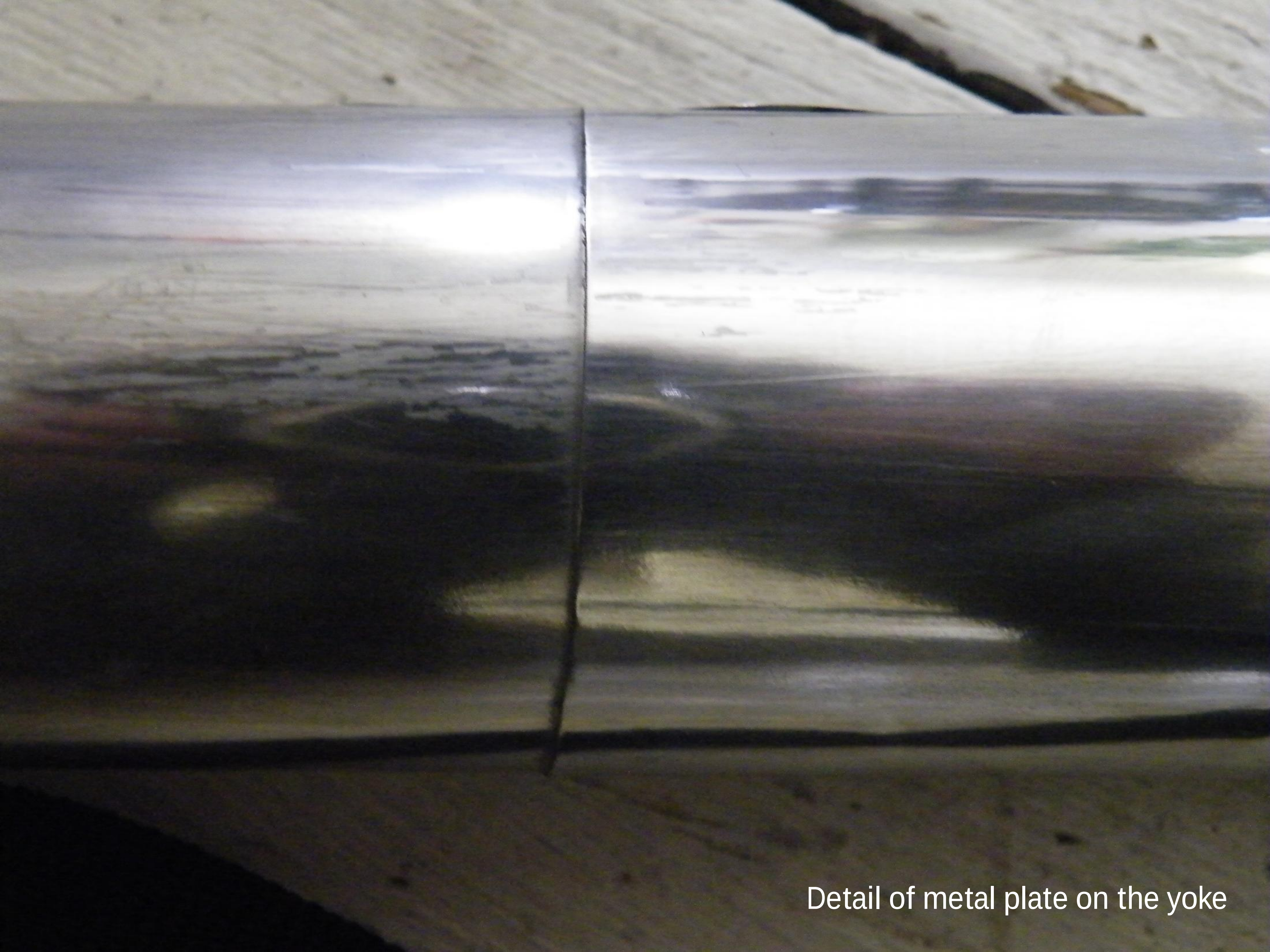
insfrastructure



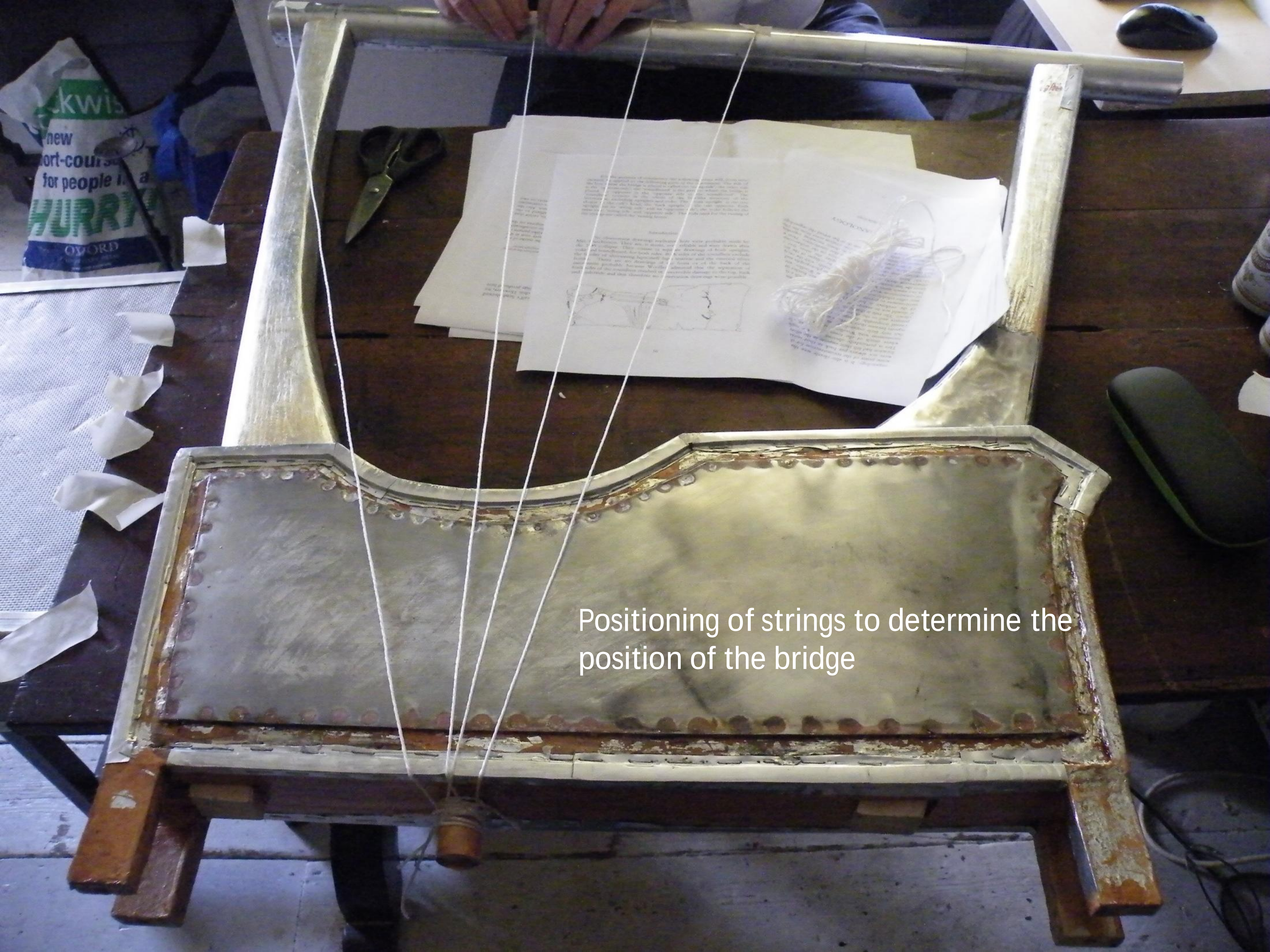
tenon



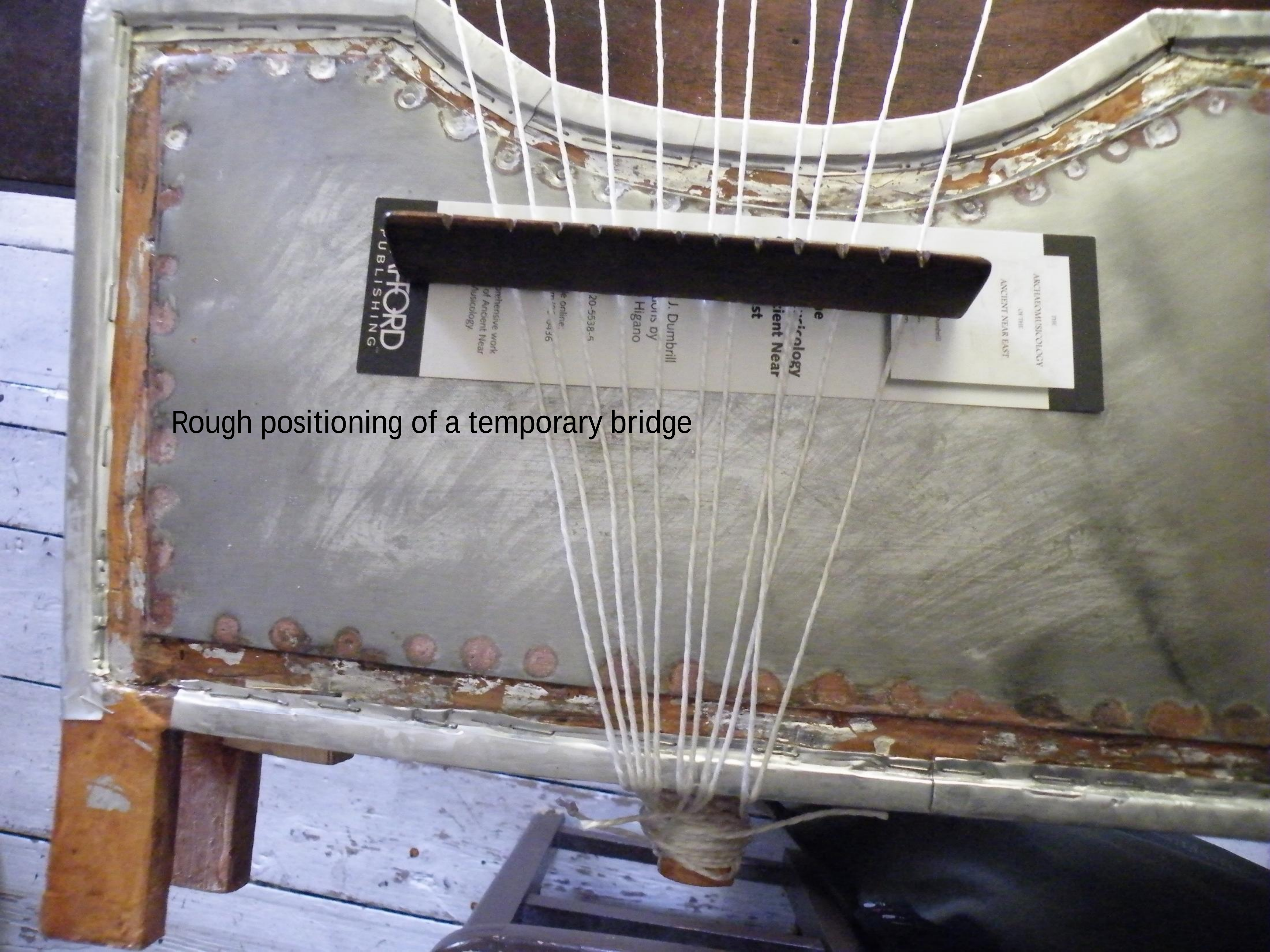
Silver soundboard



Detail of metal plate on the yoke



Positioning of strings to determine the position of the bridge

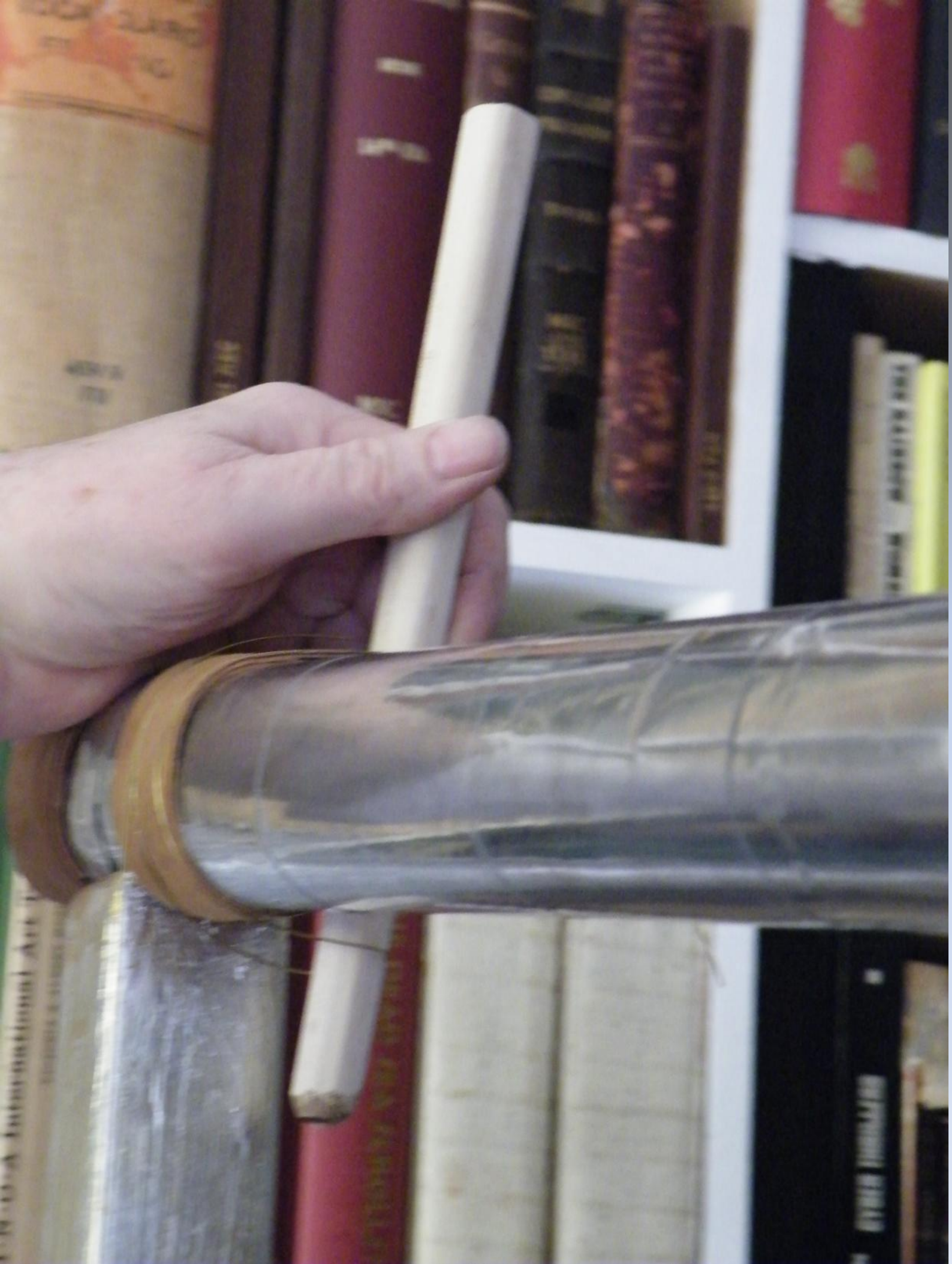


Rough positioning of a temporary bridge

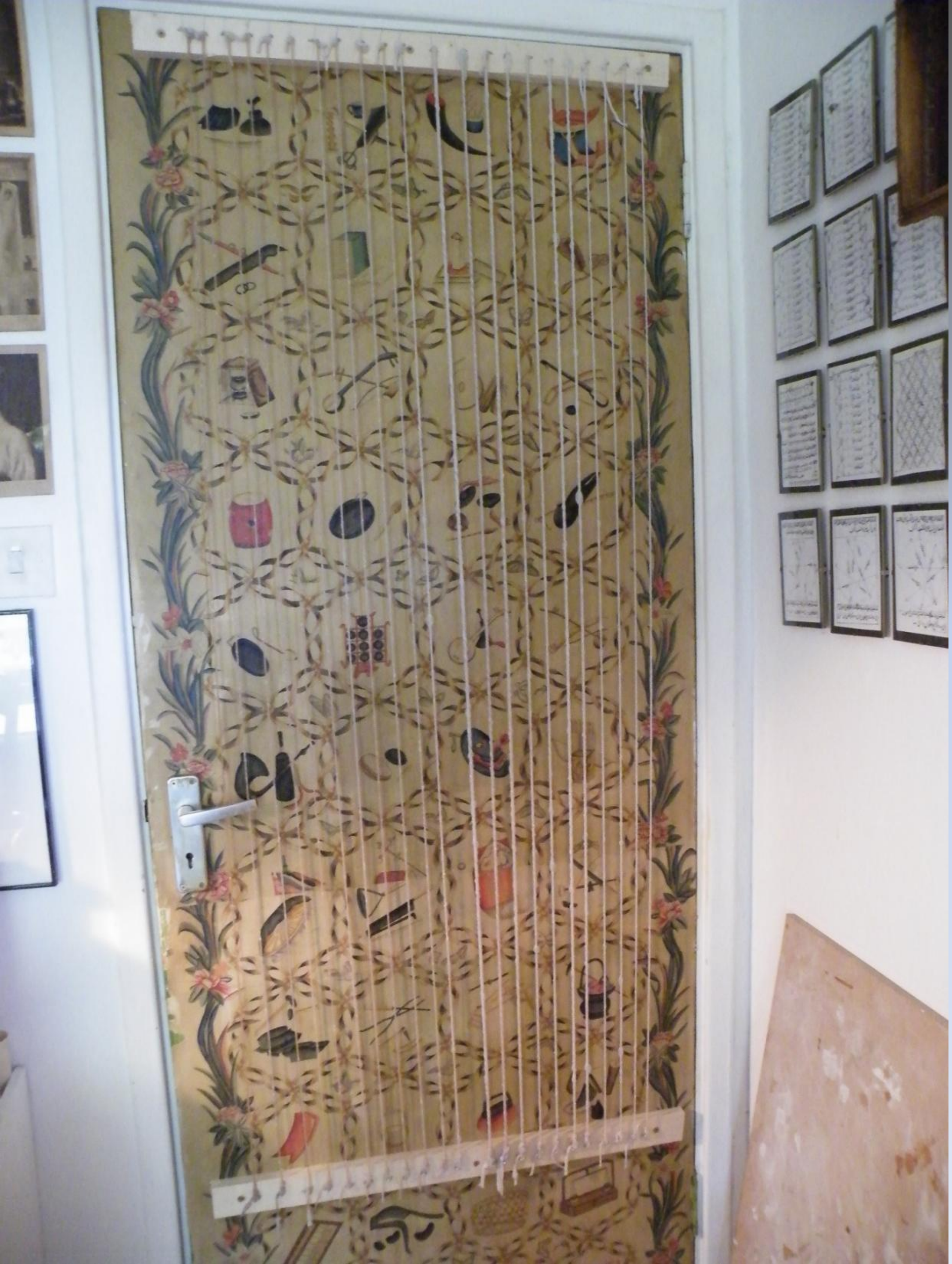
Preparing hard wood (sycamore) for tuning levers

John Dean, teacher of sculpture at Heatherley School of art, not only crafted the calf’s head but also helped in making the tuning levers.

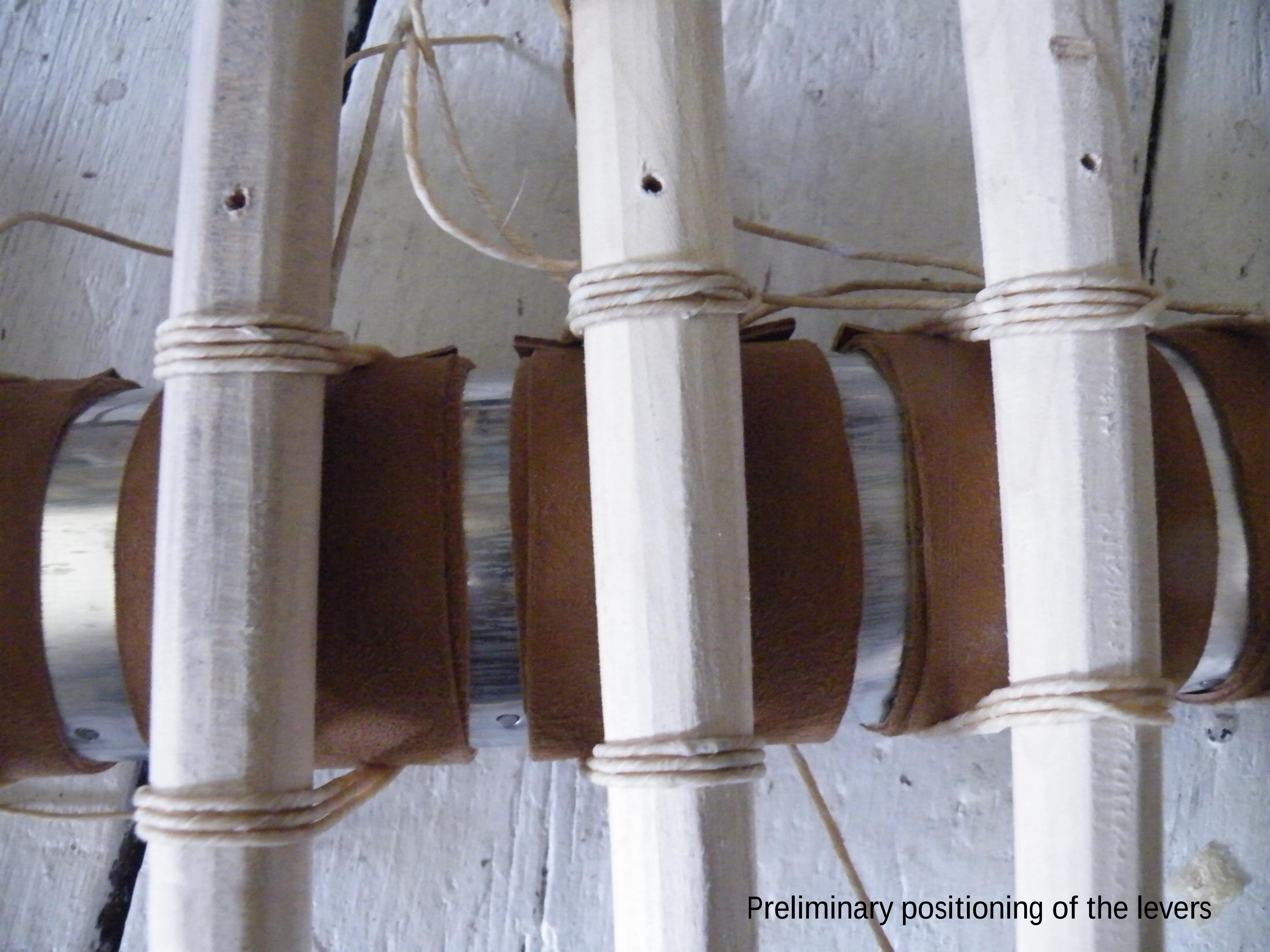
Making the tuning levers



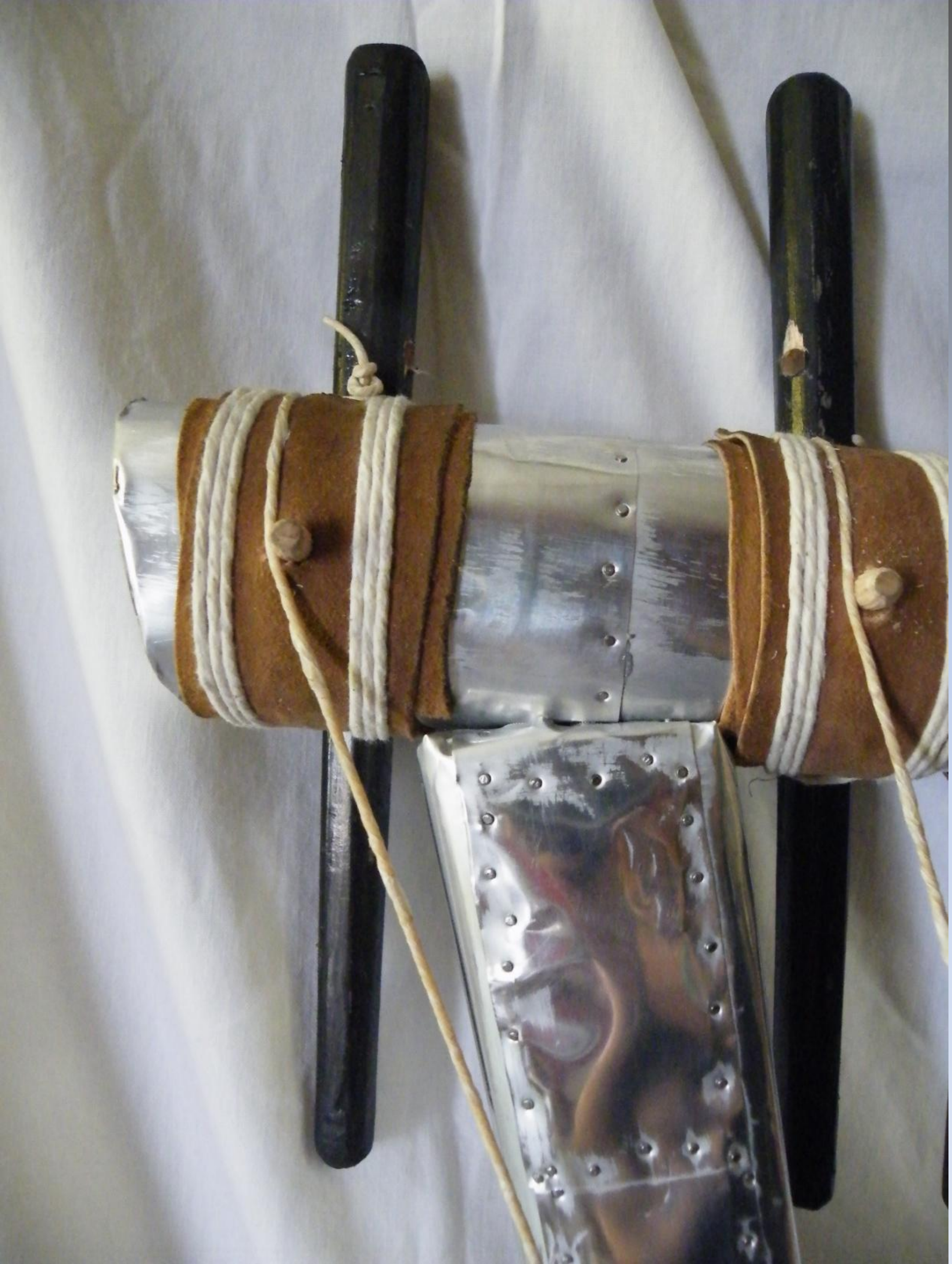
Rough positioning of the levers



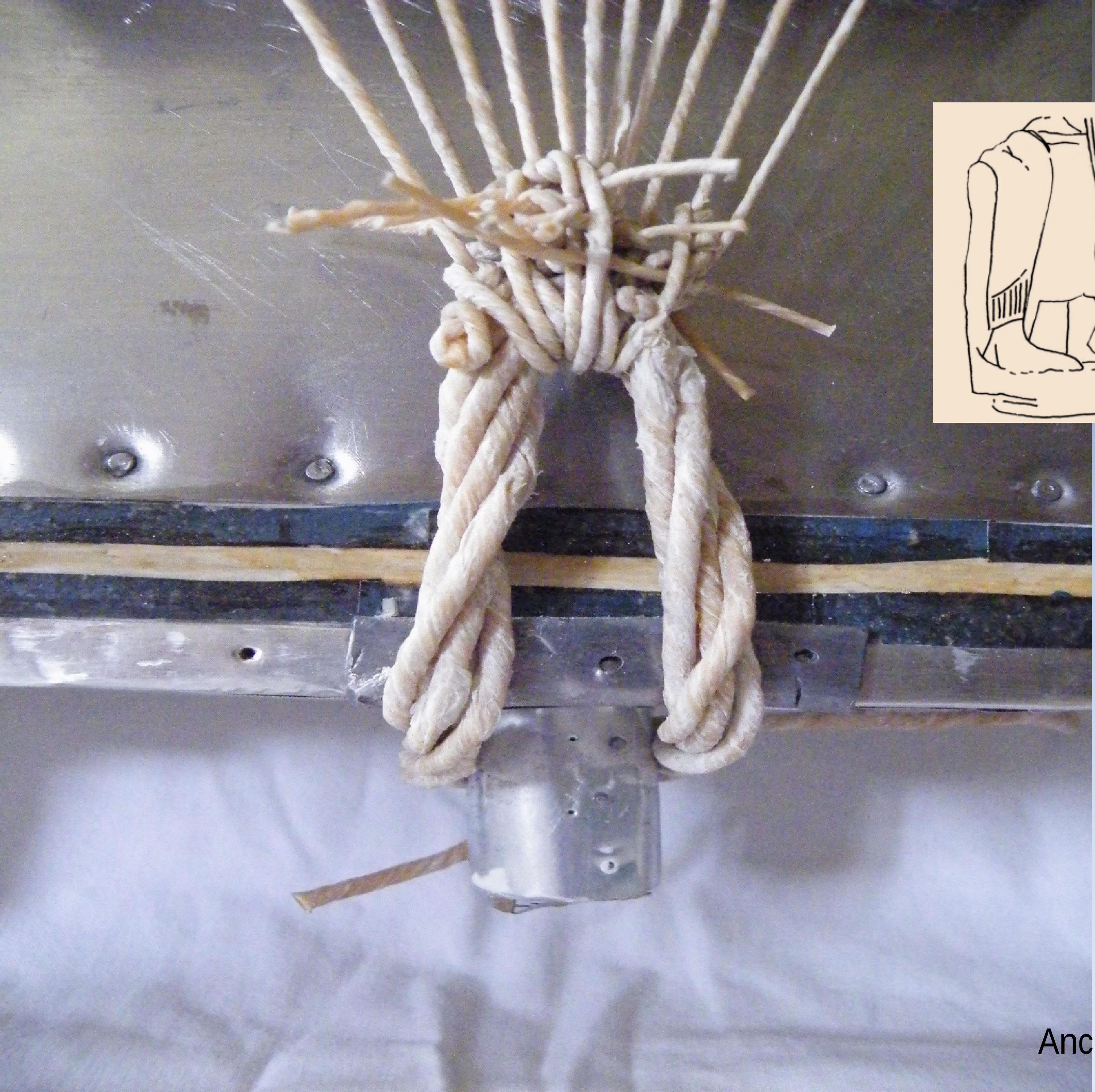
How to use a door with hand-painted
Chinese wall-paper to stretch
Home-made wet and smelly gut-strings…



Preliminary positioning of the levers

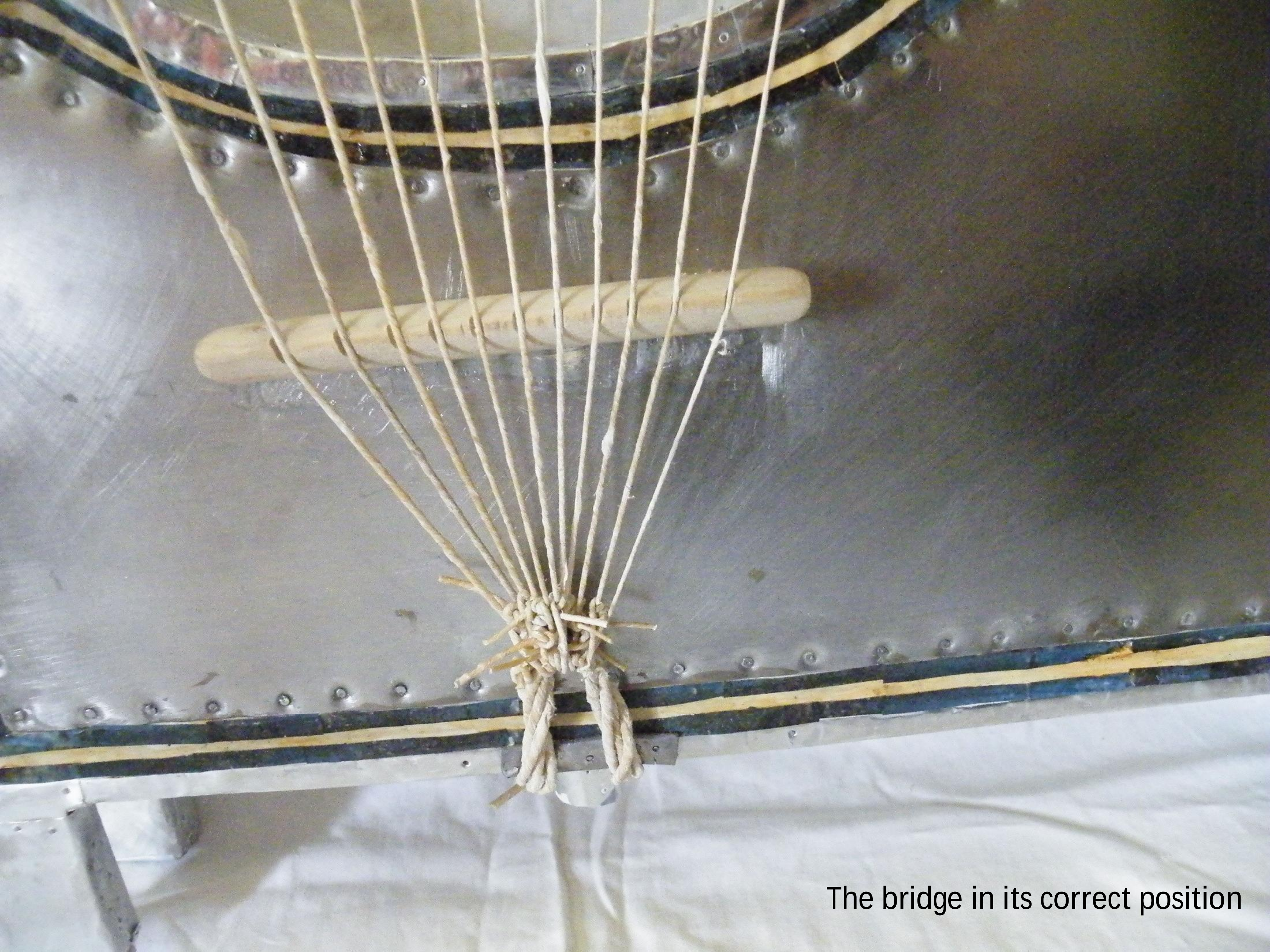


Detail of levers

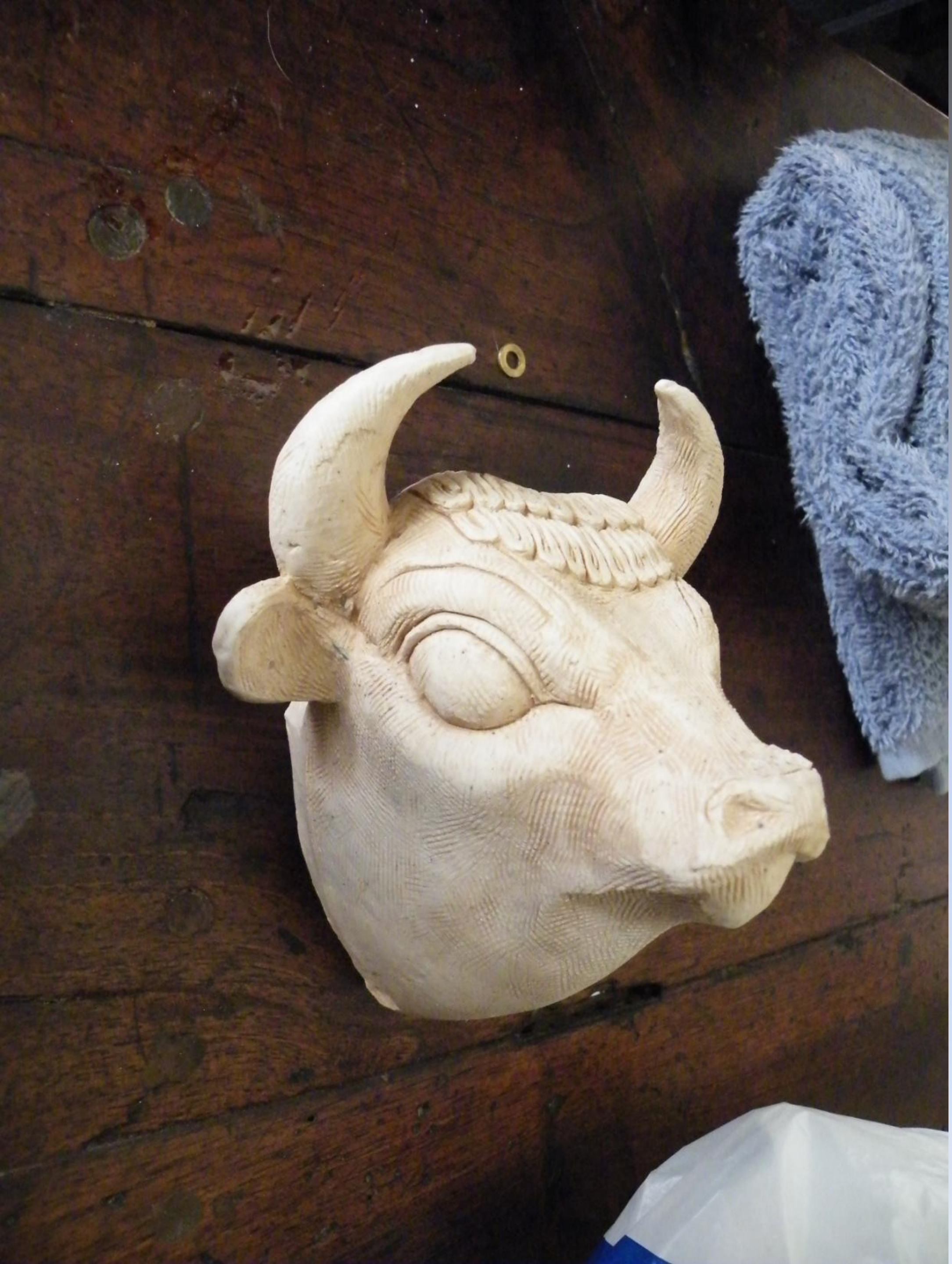


Large standing lyre form Ischali.
Stone relief

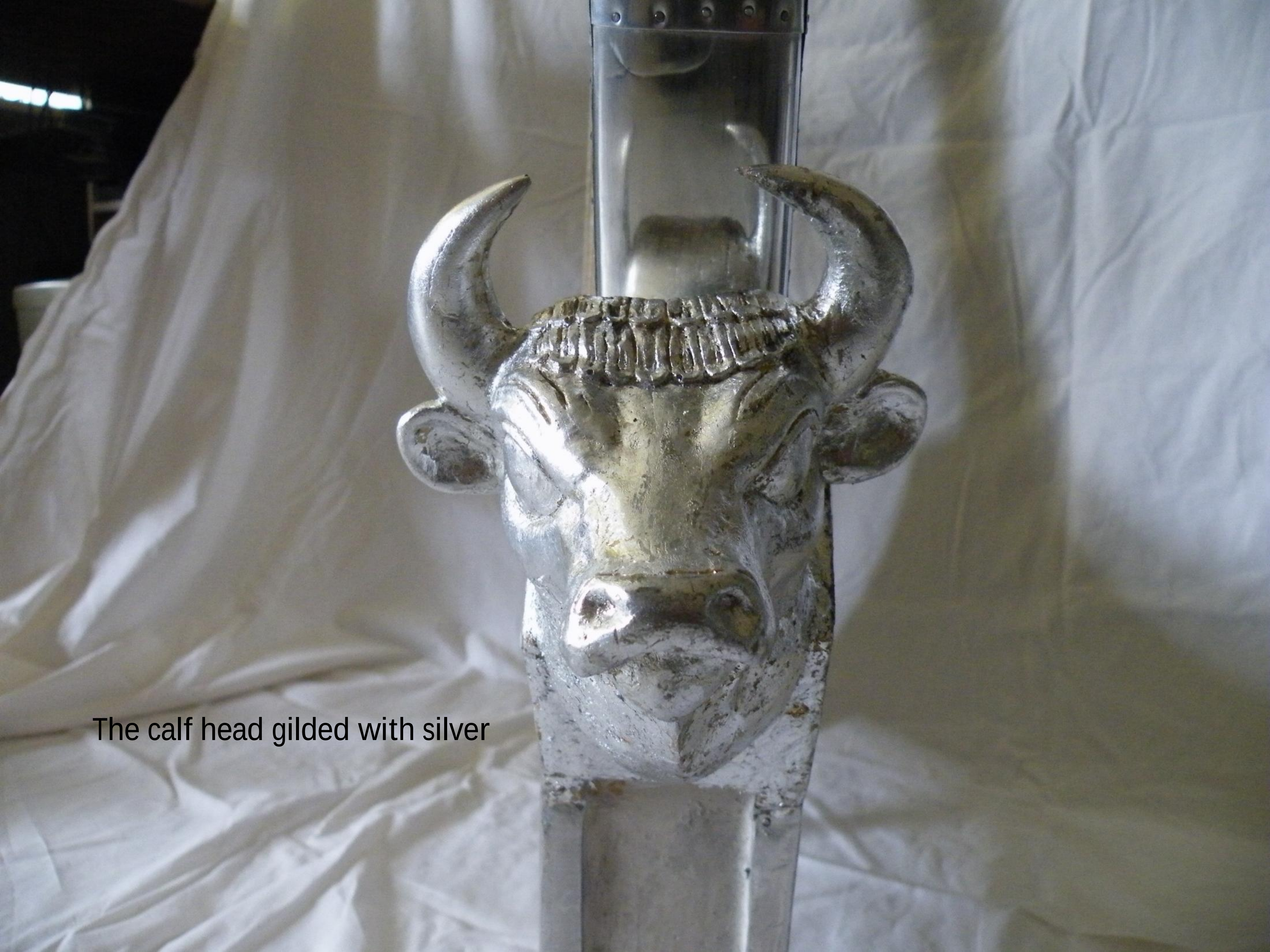
Anchorage of the strings



The bridge in its correct position

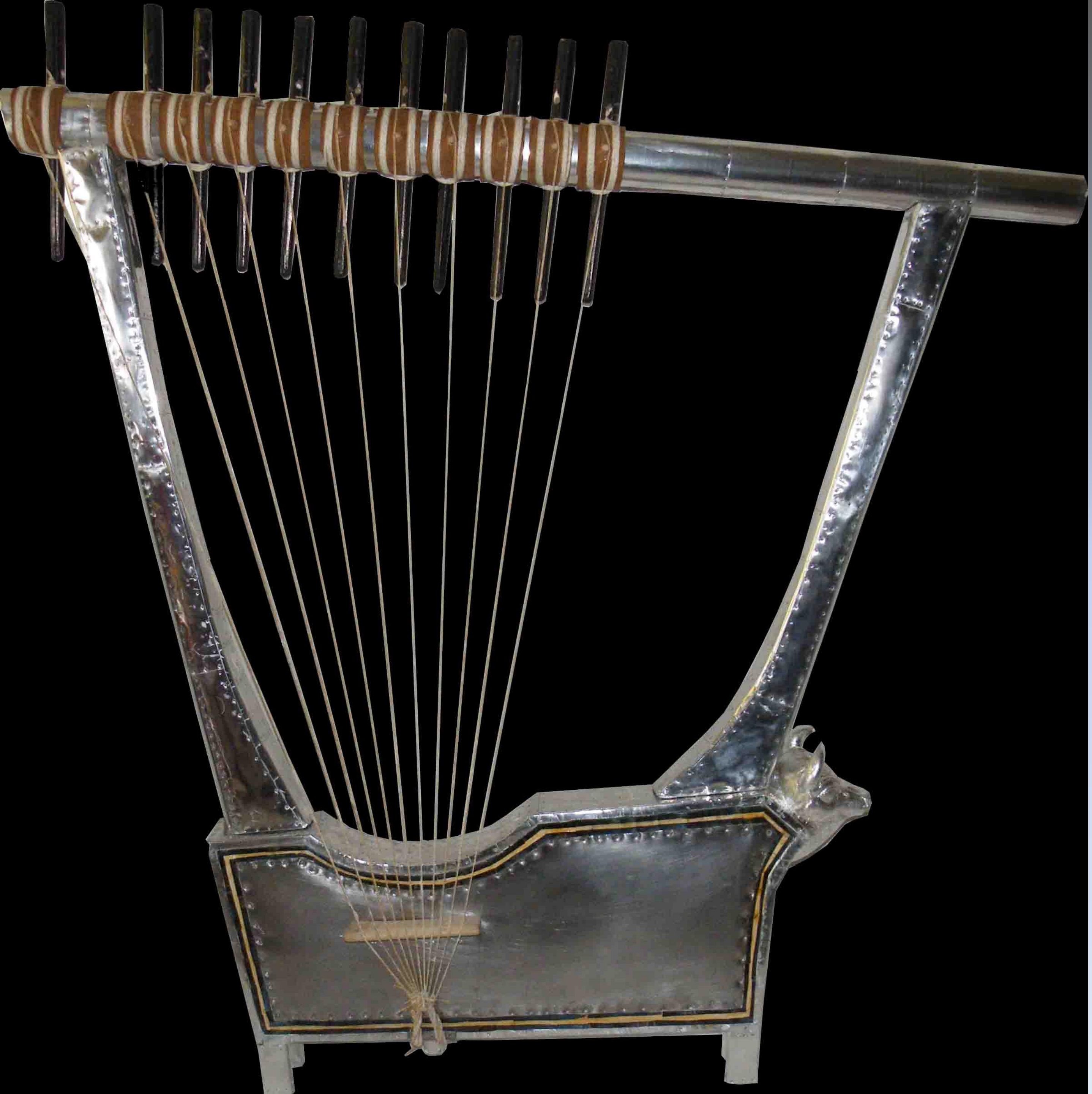


John Dean’s calf head



The calf head gilded with silver

Next, a cat-lyre strung with cat gut, of course

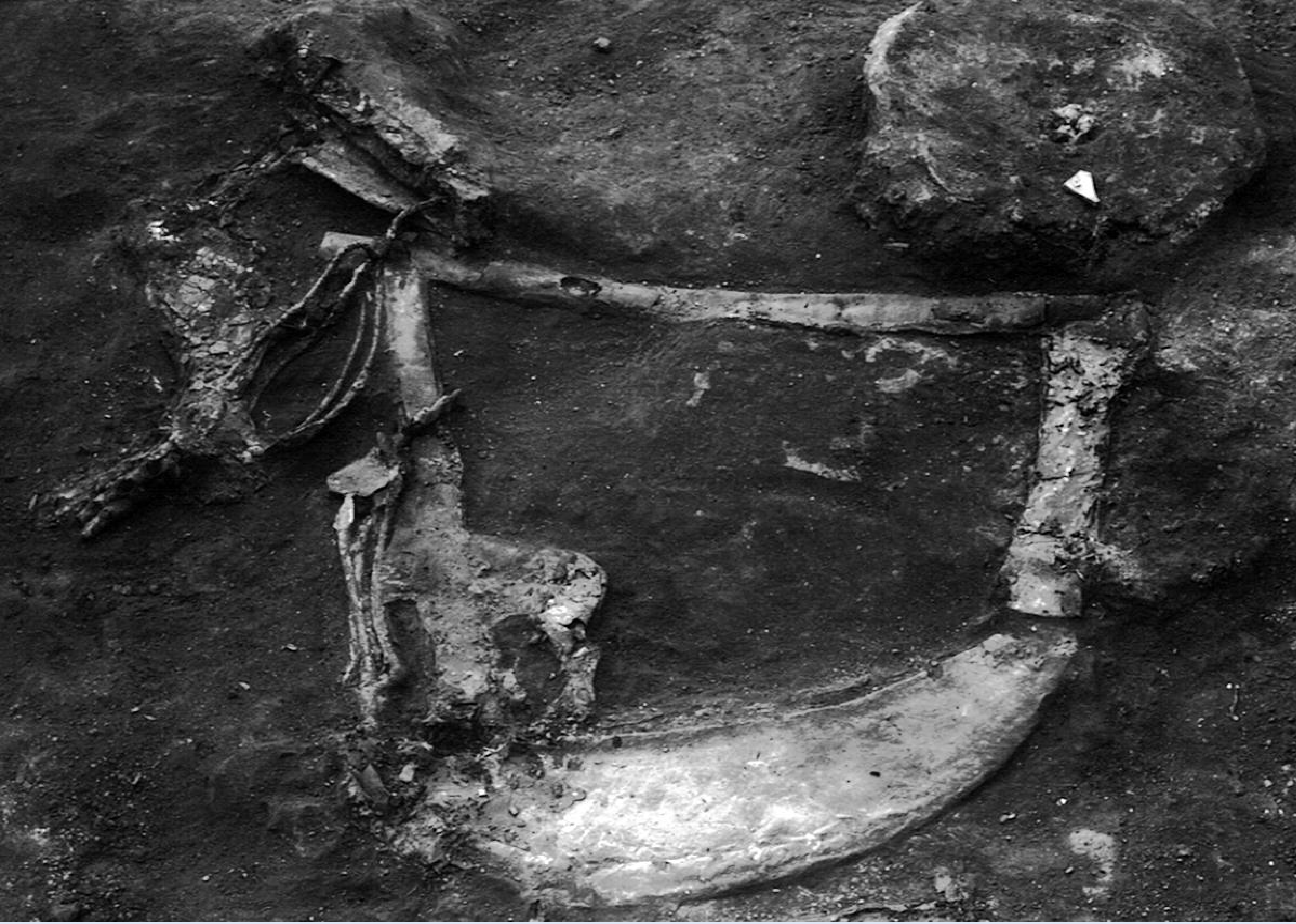


Replication
of the silver lyre, 2009

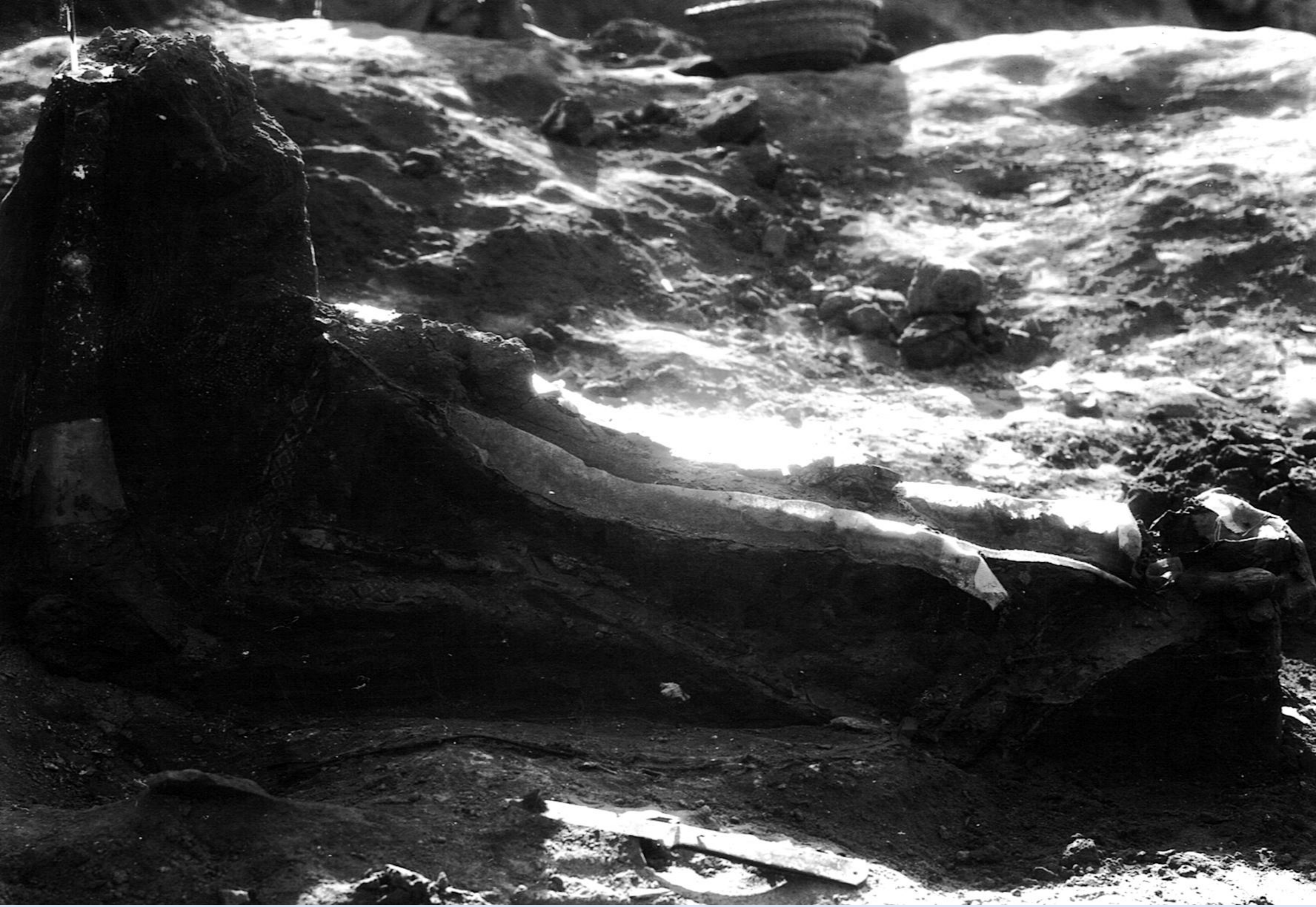
Conclusions:

1. Silver soundboard
2. Rotating tuning levers
3. Was the instrument intended to play in the pentatonic or the diatonic?
4. Tuning in relation to nabnitu XXXII
5. UET VII 74 revisited
6. Why 11 strings

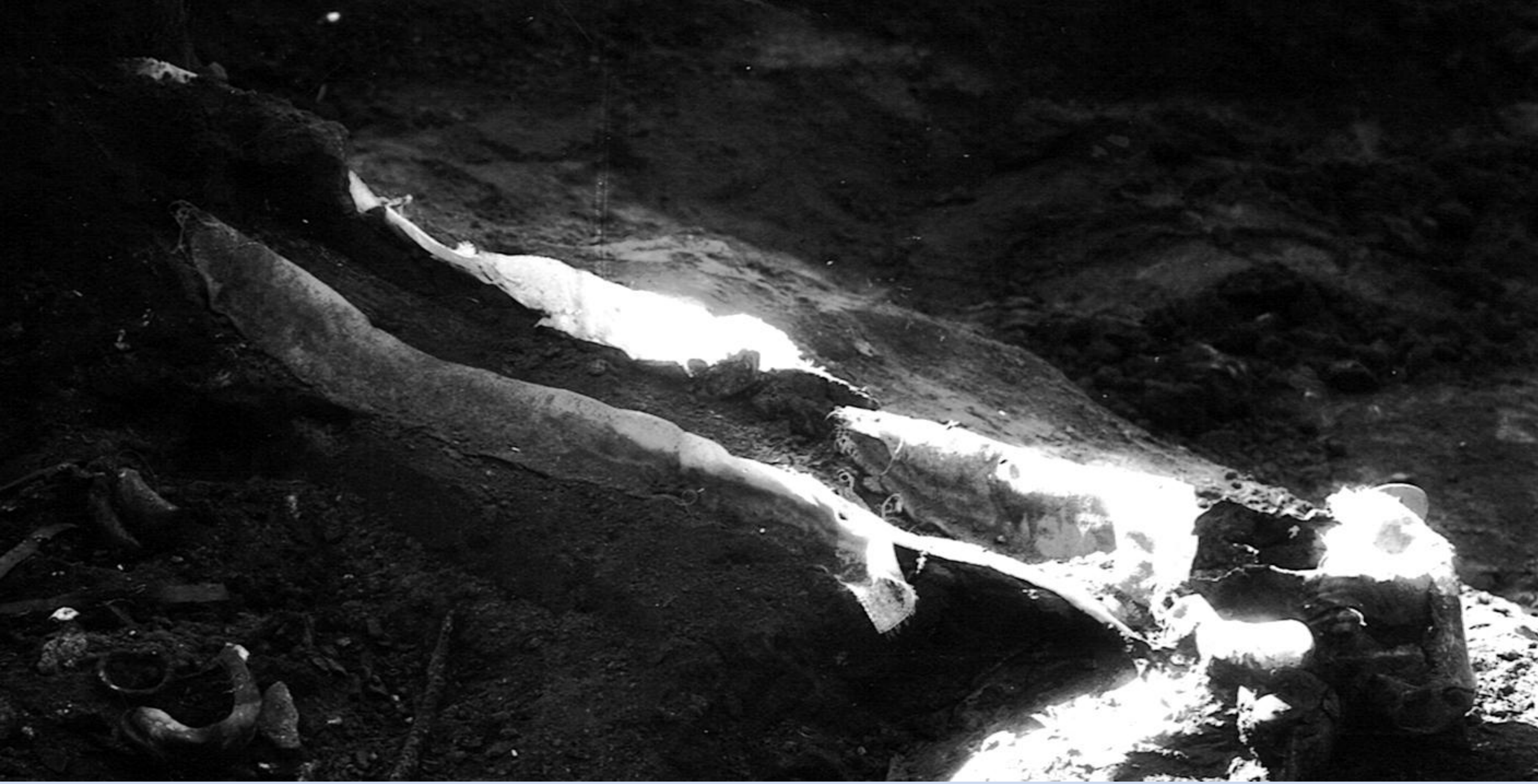
Silver soundboard?



The stag lyre U 1218



Another silver soundbox U 985

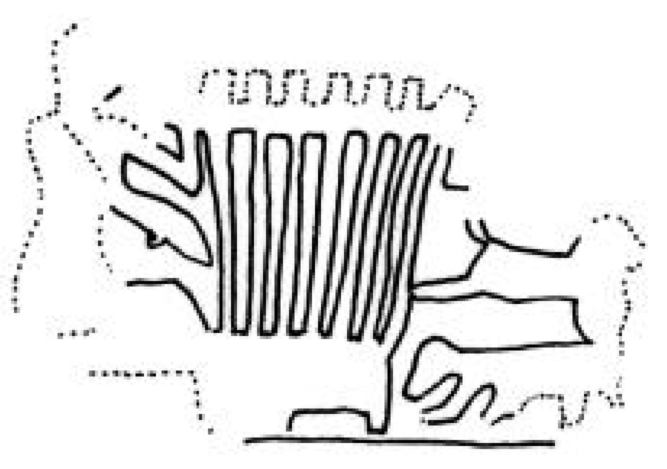


Detail of previous instrument

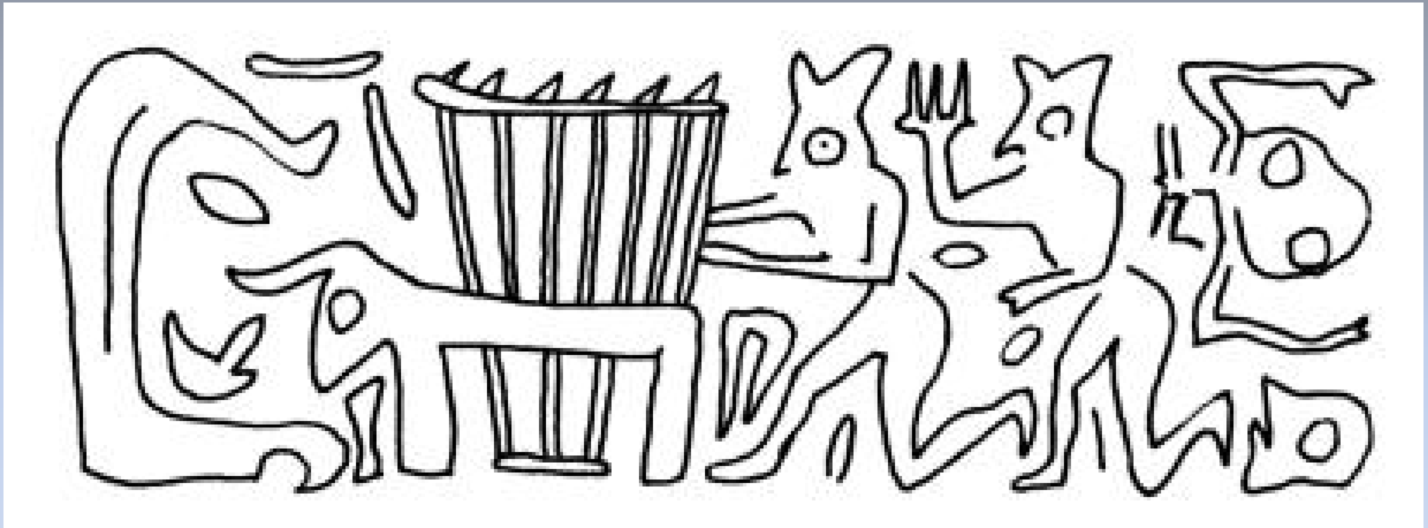
Rotating tuning levers?

Pentatonic or diatonic?

Pentatonic (Fara)

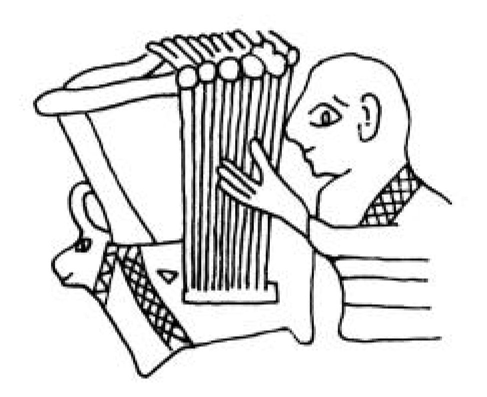


Pentatonic (Susa)



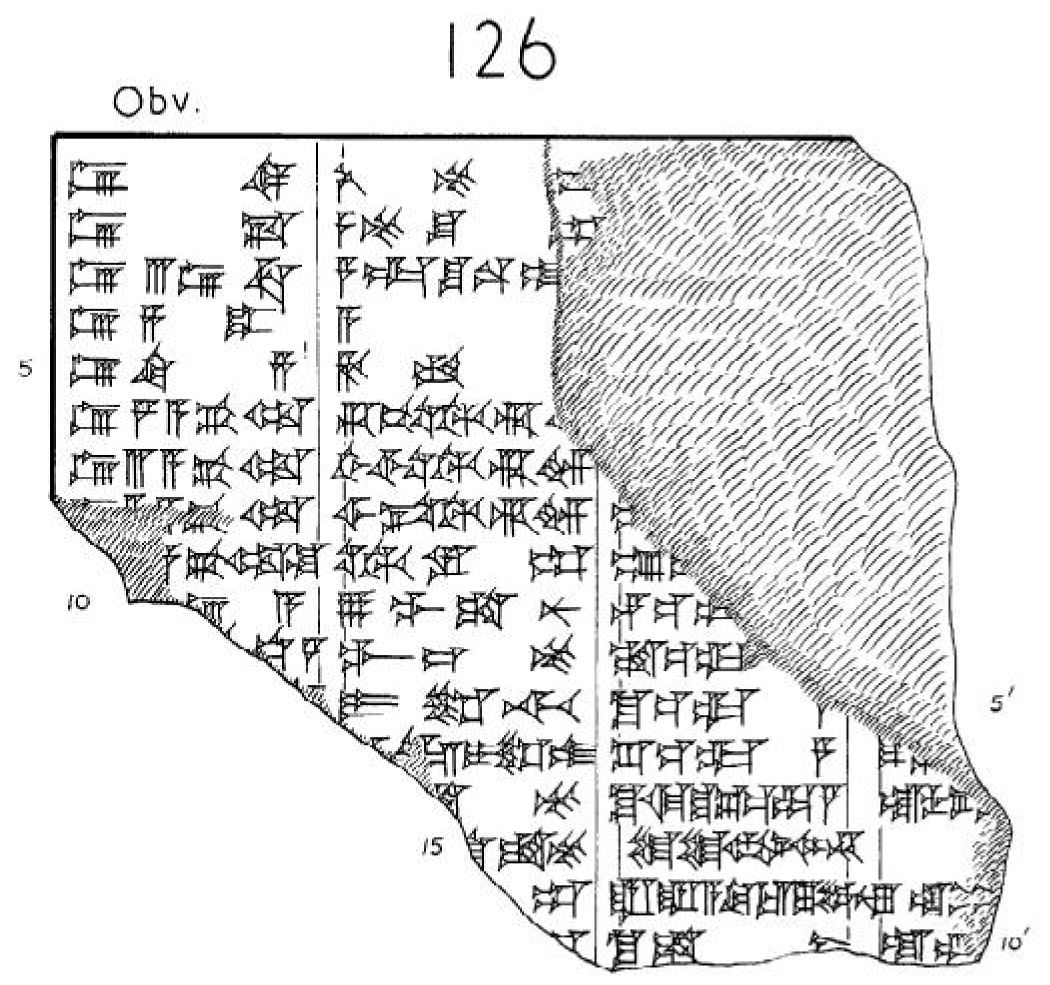
Pentatonic (Ur)

Diatonic (Telloh and Ur)

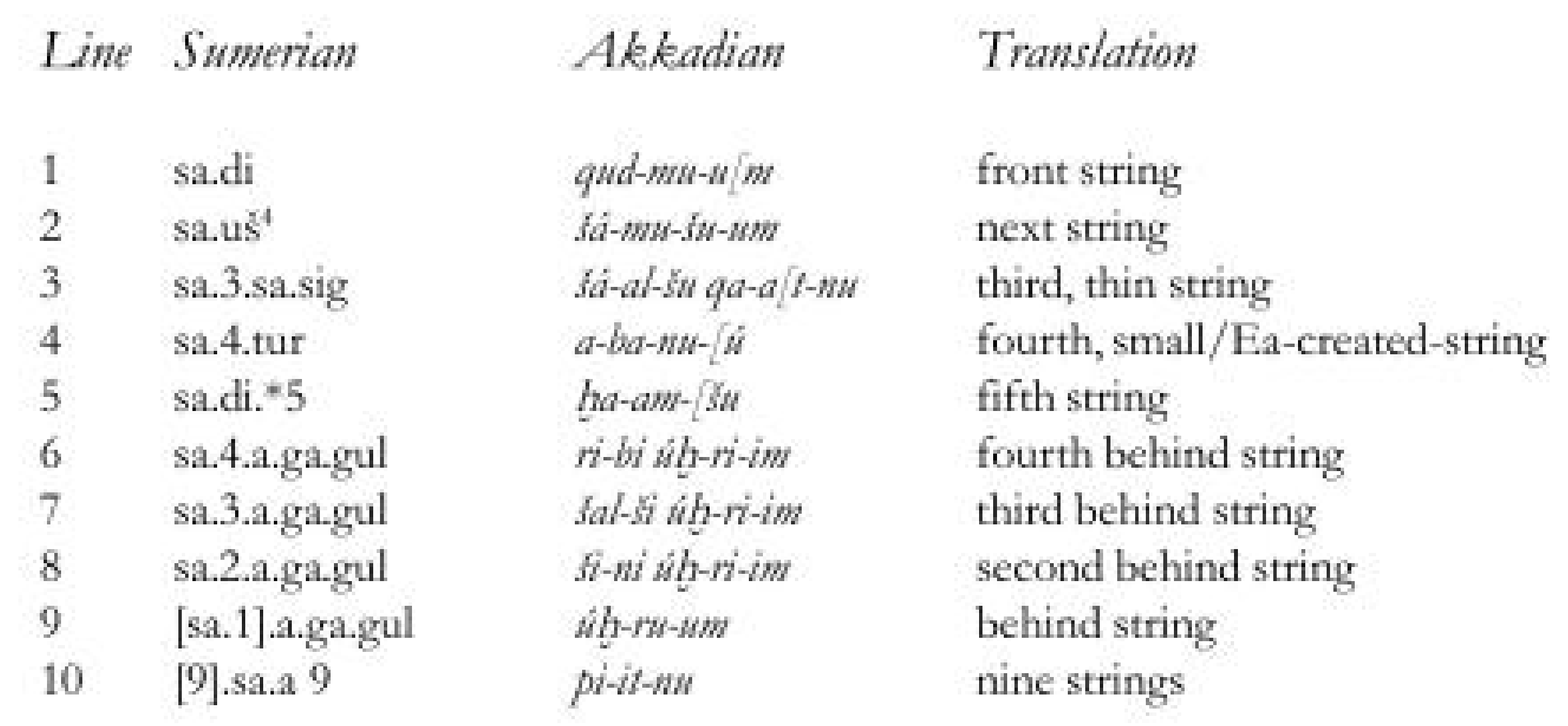


Diatonic (Ur)

Nabnitu XXXII

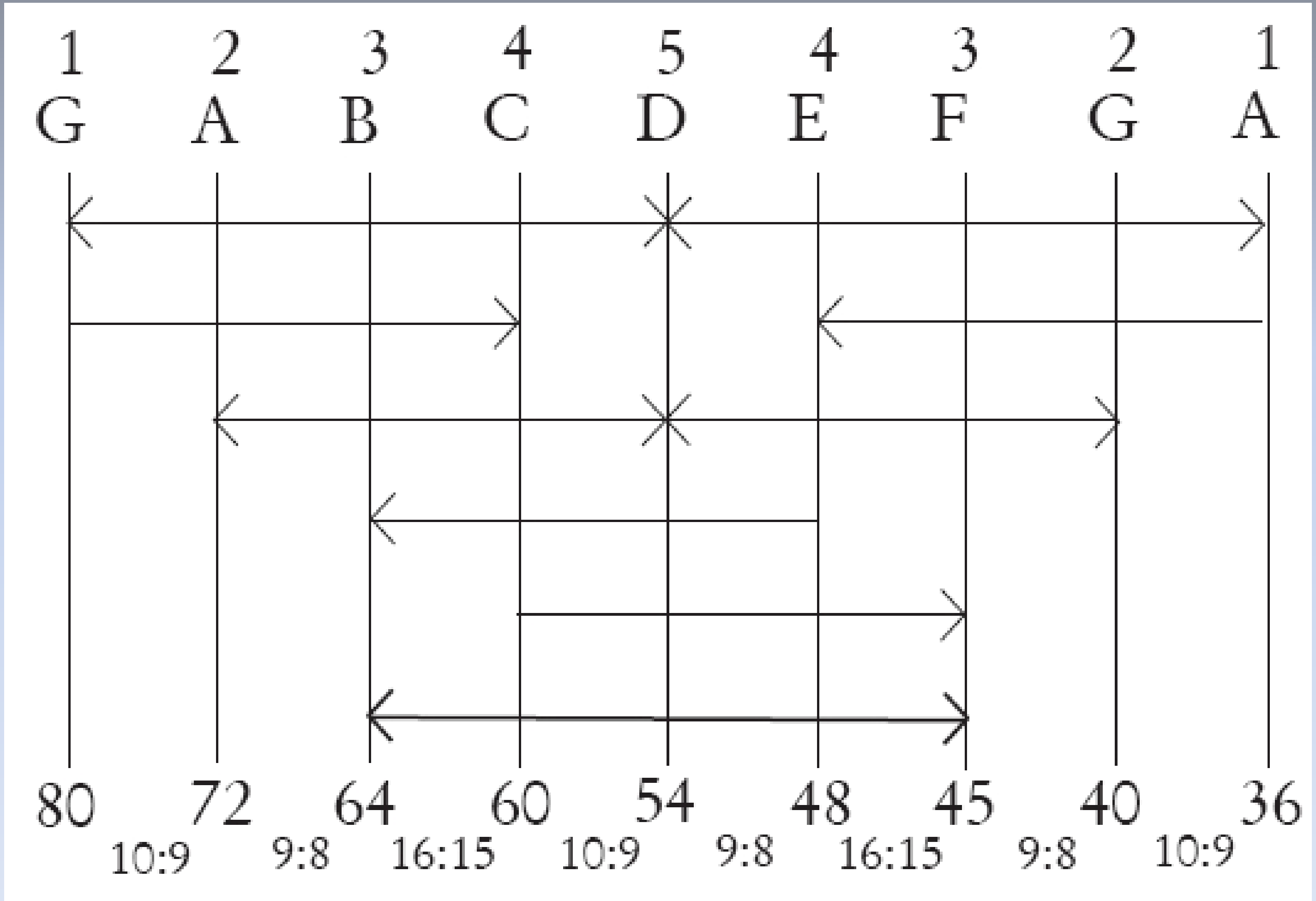


Nabnitu XXXII



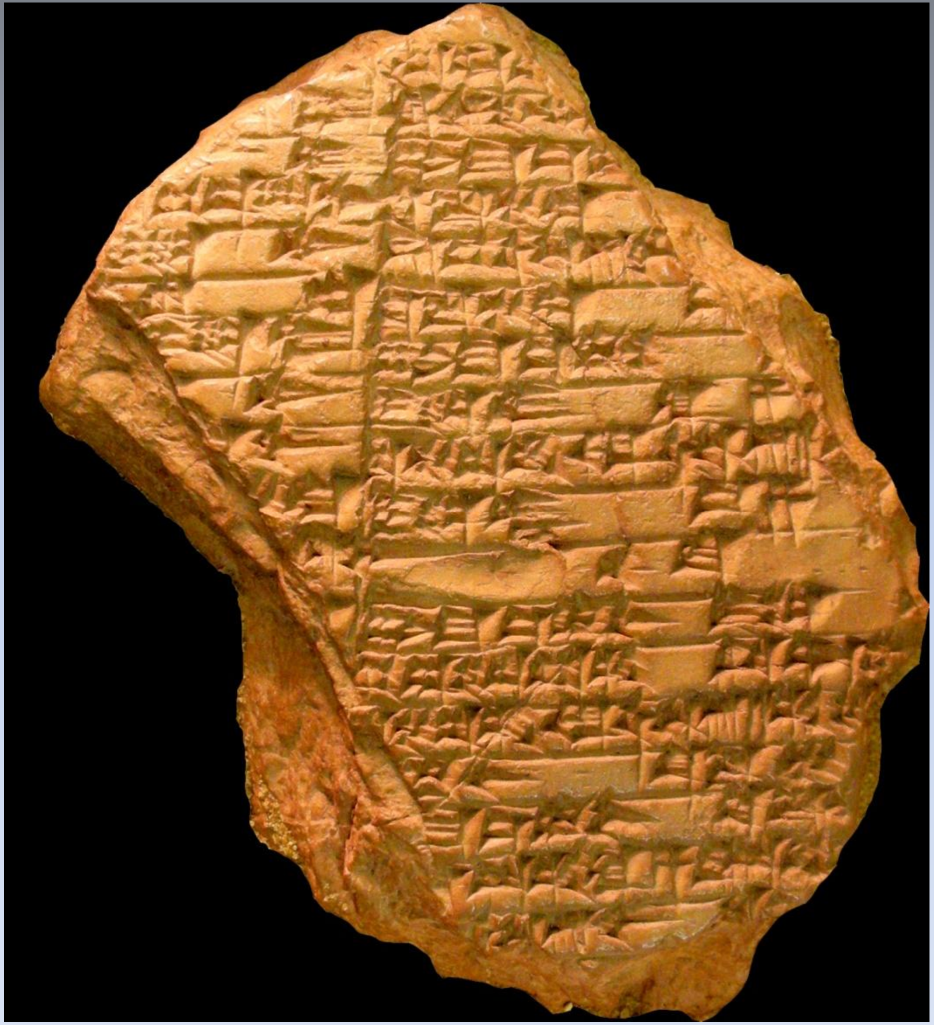
Line	*Sumerian*	*Akkadian*	*Translation*
1	sa.di	*qud-mu-u[m*	front string
2	sa.uš^{4}	*šá-mu-šu-um*	next string
3	sa.3.sa.sig	*šá-al-šu qa-a[t-nu*	third, thin string
4	sa.4.tur	*a-ba-nu-[ú*	fourth, small/Ea-created-string
5	sa.di.*5	*ḫa-am-[šu*	fifth string
6	sa.4.a.ga.gul	*ri-bi úḫ-ri-im*	fourth behind string
7	sa.3.a.ga.gul	*šal-ši úḫ-ri-im*	third behind string
8	sa.2.a.ga.gul	*ši-ni úḫ-ri-im*	second behind string
9	[sa.1].a.ga.gul	*úḫ-ru-um*	behind string
10	[9].sa.a 9	*pi-it-nu*	nine strings

Nabnitu XXXII



Nabnitu XXXII produces the mode of pitum, the ‘opening’ of the system

UET VII 74



UET VII 74

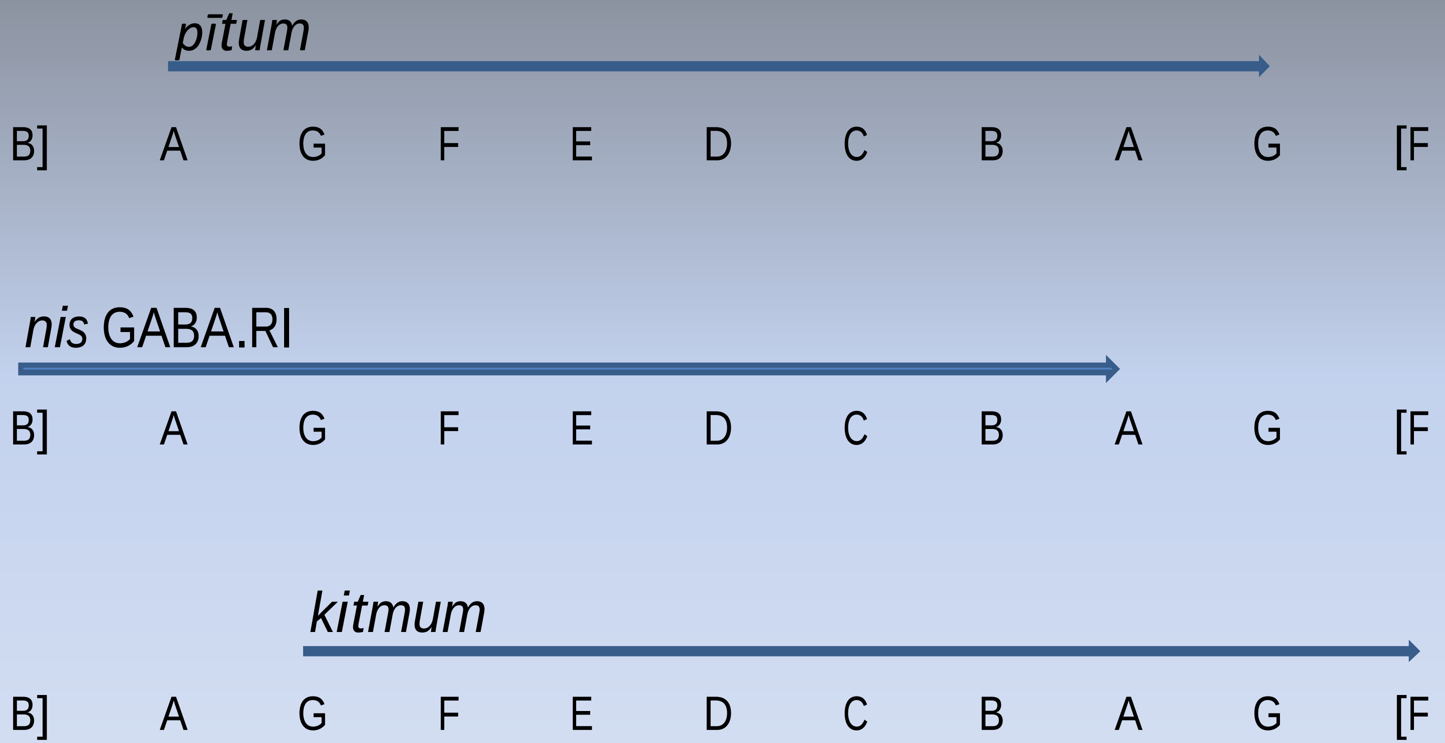
If the harp is in *pītum* (mode)
embūbum (interval) is unclear (tritone)
tune up string 3
embūbum (interval) is clear

If the harp is in *embūbum* (mode)
kitmum (interval) in unclear (tritone)
tune up string 6
kitmum (interval) is clear

If the harp is in *kitmum* (mode)
išartum (interval) is unclear
tune up string 2 and 9
išartum (interval) is clear

If the harp is in *išartum* (mode)
qablītum (interval) is unclear
tune down string 2 and 9
kitmum (interval) is clear

Why 11 strings



pītum

B] A G F E D C B A G [F

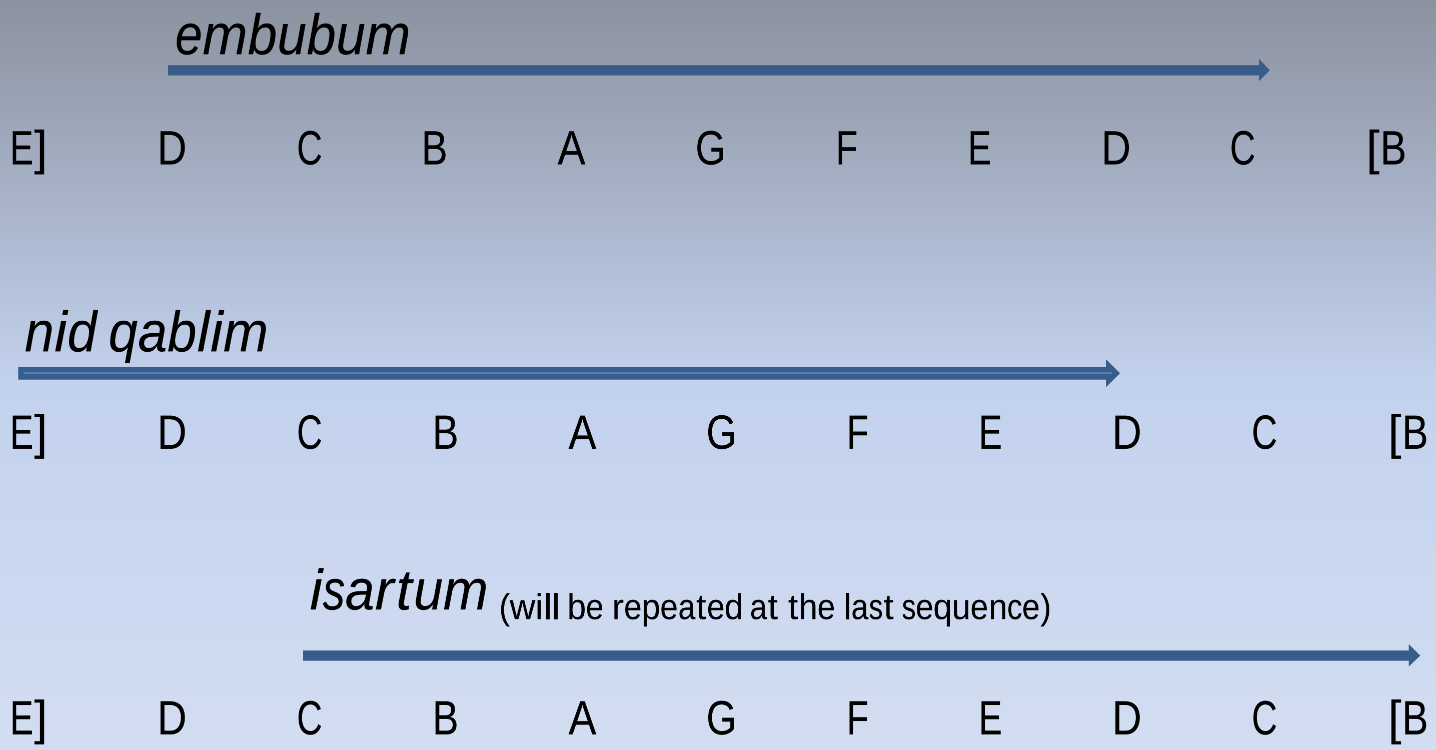
nis GABA.RI

B] A G F E D C B A G [F

kitmum

B] A G F E D C B A G [F

Why 11 strings



embubum

E] D C B A G F E D C [B

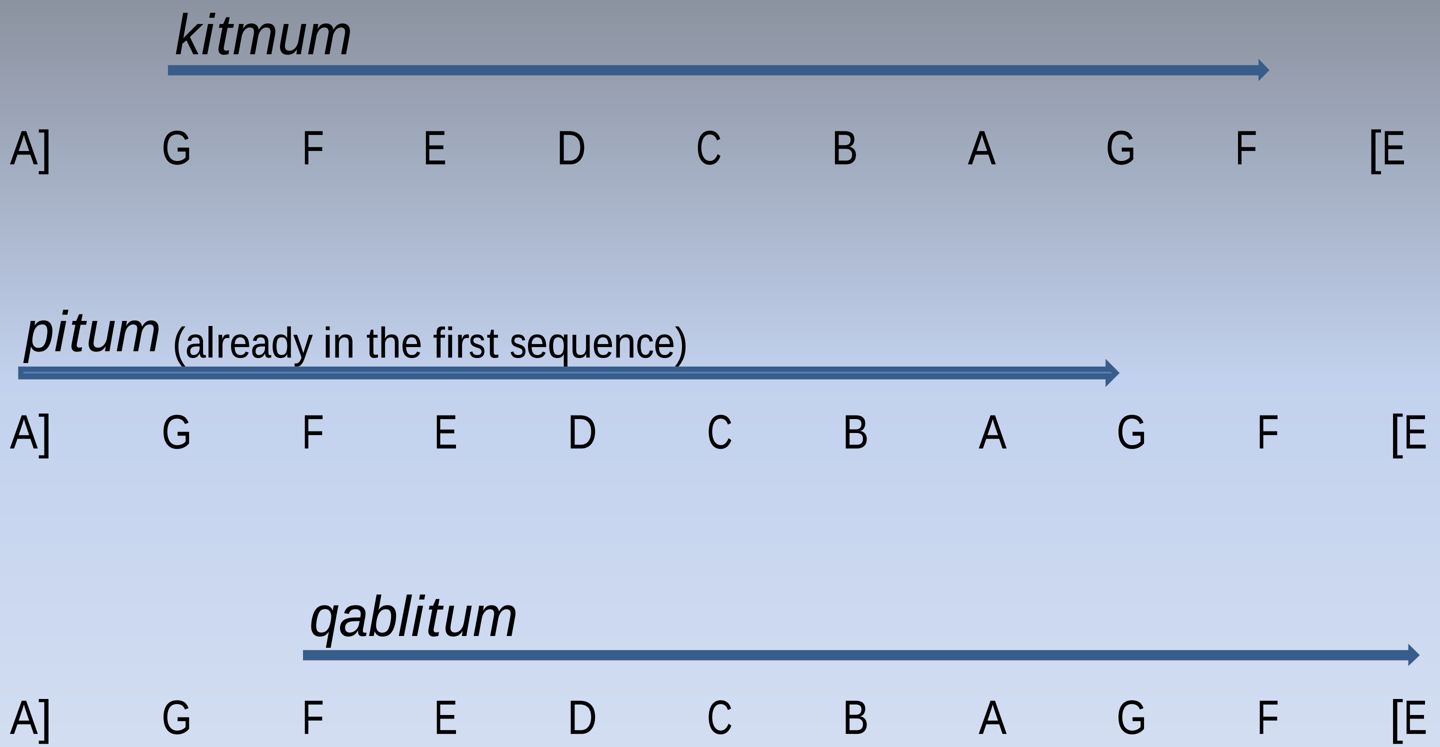
nid qablim

E] D C B A G F E D C [B

isartum (will be repeated at the last sequence)

E] D C B A G F E D C [B

Why 11 strings



kitmum

A] G F E D C B A G F [E

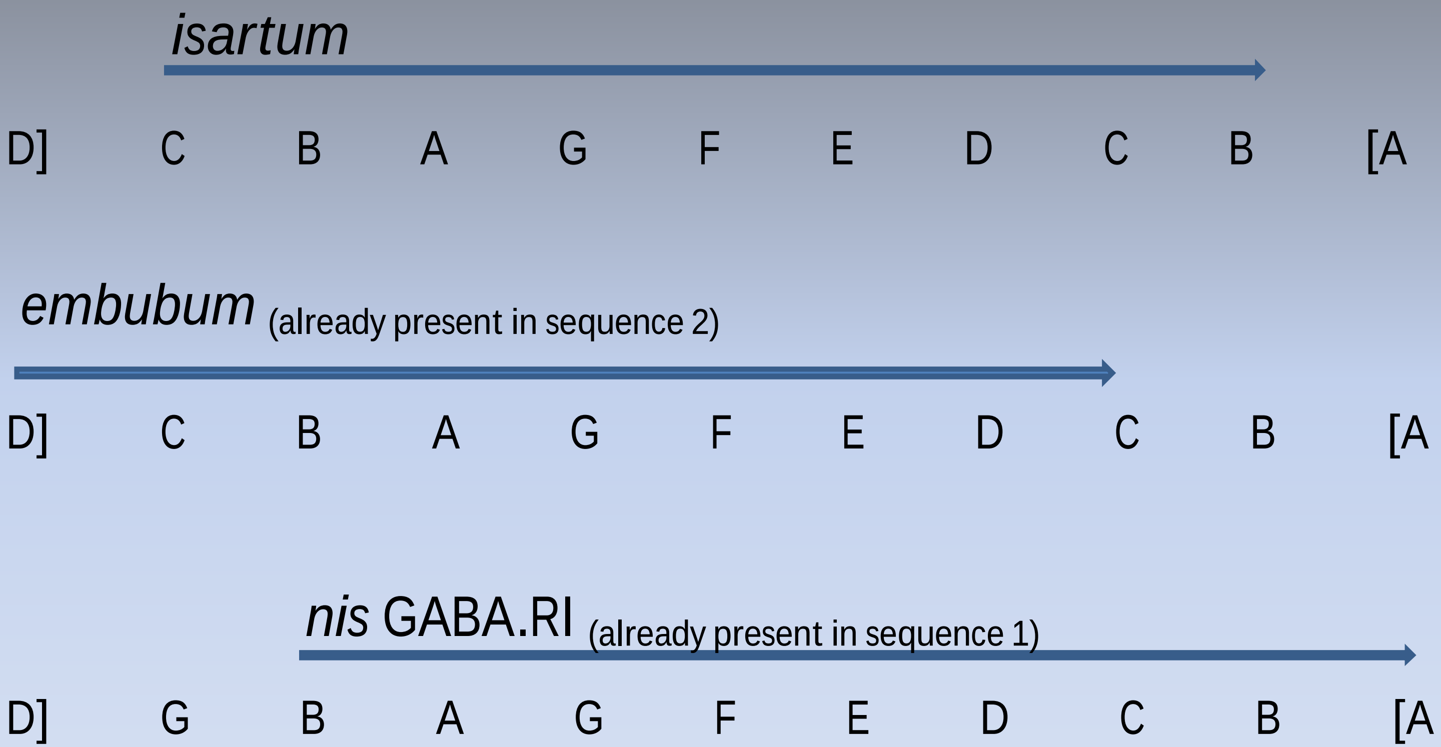
pitum (already in the first sequence)

A] G F E D C B A G F [E

qablitum

A] G F E D C B A G F [E

Why 11 strings



isartum

D] C B A G F E D C B [A

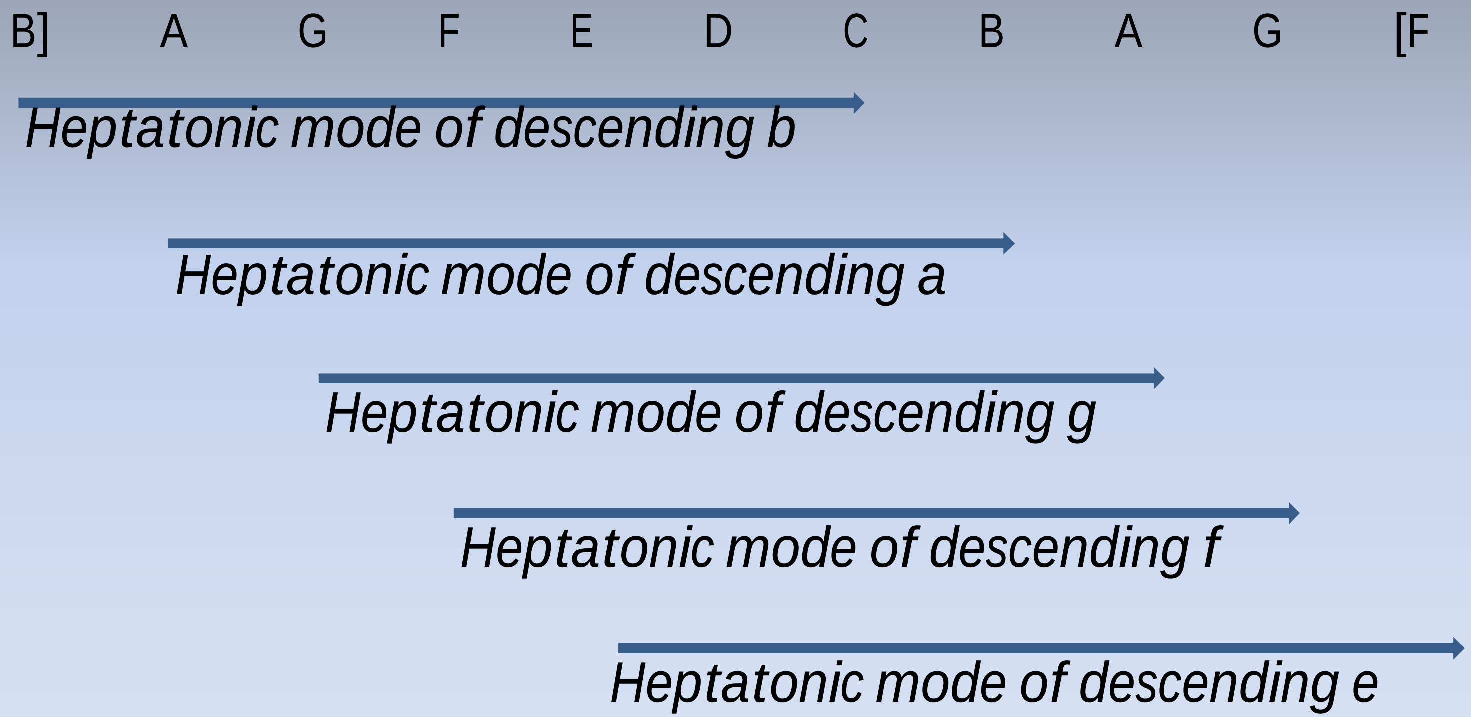
embubum (already present in sequence 2)

D] C B A G F E D C B [A

nis GABA.RI (already present in sequence 1)

D] G B A G F E D C B [A

Why 11 strings



B] A G F E D C B A G [F

Heptatonic mode of descending b

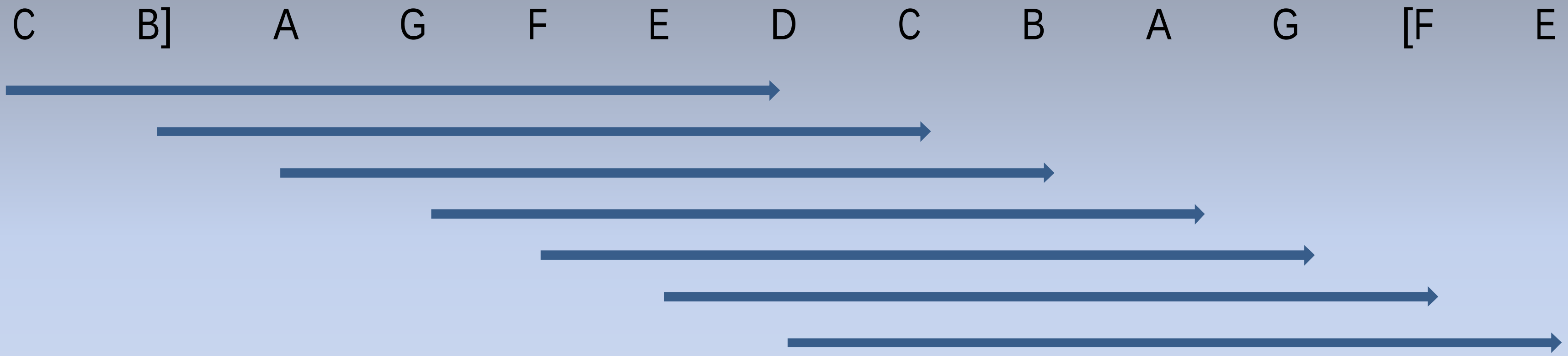
Heptatonic mode of descending a

Heptatonic mode of descending g

Heptatonic mode of descending f

Heptatonic mode of descending e

13 strings: the perfect system



C B] A G F E D C B A G [F E